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*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, 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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 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.*

Colossians 1:24-2:5

Recently a woman wrote of buying a new car that was loaded with all sorts of new high-tech options. The first time she drove the car in the rain, she turned a knob which she thought would start the wind-shield wipers, but instead a message flashed across the screen of her dashboard: "Drive car in 360 degrees." She had no idea what that meant, and so she drove to the side of the road and pulled out her manual. It was there she learned that while trying to turn on the windshield wipers, she had inadvertently turned off the internal compass in the car's computer, and in doing so the car had lost its sense of direction. To correct the problem, the computer instructed that the car had to be driven in a full circle, 360 degrees, pointed north, and then the compass would be reset. This is what we do every Sunday morning at Arrowsmith. After making our way down the winding path of life that leads us through our fallen world during the week, we gather together on Sunday to reset the spiritual compass of our souls, to once again point preeminently to the true north of Jesus Christ through the preaching – the proclaiming – of the Word of God, reminding us who God truly is and what His truth proclaims.

Preaching, proclaiming the Word of God, has been, and continues to be, an area of great controversy in the church. Many throughout history, as in today, have sought to severely diminish the importance of proclaiming of God's Word in exchange for good feelings and emotional unity. John Steinbeck once wrote about his thoughts on a sermon he heard while attending a church in New England. He wrote:

It had been long since I had heard such a good approach. It is our practice now, at least in the large cities, to find from our psychiatric priesthood that our sins aren't really sins at all, but accidents that are set in motion by forces beyond our control. But there was no nonsense in this church. As he preached the minister reassured us that we were a pretty sorry lot. And he was right. Having softened us up, he then went into a glorious, a fire-and-brimstone sermon. He spoke of hell as an expert, not the mush-mush hell of these soft days, but a well-stoked, white-hot hell served by technicians of the first order.

The great English actor William Macready was once asked by a prominent preacher, “Why is it that is you appear before large crowds night after night *with fiction*, yet I am preaching *the essential and unchangeable truth of God*, and I am not getting any crowd at all.” Too which Macready answered, “Simple. I present my fiction as though it were truth; you present your truth as though it were fiction.” In writing to preachers the Puritan Richard Baxter once said, “Whatever you do, let the people see that you are in good earnest. You cannot break men's hearts by jesting with them, or telling them a smooth tale, or patching up a gaudy oration. Men will not cast away their dearest pleasures upon a drowsy request of one that seems not to mean what he speaks, or to care much whether his request is granted.”

The apostle Paul did not preach truth as if it were fiction. Neither was he funny or smooth or fancy in his speech. Paul preached the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 he wrote: " *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*" Paul understood his call to preach the gospel; "I was appointed a preacher" he says in 2 Timothy 1:11. The word for "preacher" means "one who makes public announcements on another's behalf." The master of his soul called Paul to proclaim the gospel. Paul was not a philosopher, nor a moralist, nor one of the world's wisest men. He simply had been called by God to publicly "announce" (proclaim, preach) Jesus Christ. His whole business was to deliver the message that Jesus Christ was Lord and Savior; adding nothing, altering nothing, omitting nothing; delivering nothing but God's Word in Jesus name, carrying the power and authority of God.

At the end of our text from last week, the apostle spoke of his call to preach the gospel when he exhorted the church in Colossae to: "*continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister*" (Colossians 1:23). Paul was made a minister, a preacher not of his own choosing, but according to God's choosing. Saul of Tarsus never intended on becoming a proclaimer of the gospel or an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, just the opposite was true. He had dedicated himself to destroying the integrity and credibility of Jesus Christ and the church. Yet Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and he was forever transformed and changed. Just like Paul, if we truly cross paths with Jesus we will also go through a Damascus Road experience. Like Paul, when we encounter the risen Christ we will suddenly be blinded to the things of this world and given sight to the things of God. When we surrender our hearts to God, we will also be possessed by and empowered by God.

In the first verse of our text for today Paul wrote: "*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*" (Colossians 1:25). The word "stewardship" in the Greek means to "manage a household, or be a steward of someone else's possessions." A steward is someone who has been given a position of great trust and great responsibility in handling the affairs of someone else. As born again followers of Jesus Christ, we have been chosen and called to be stewards in ministry of preaching, proclaiming, announcing, teaching, and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are stewards of His blessings, gifts, talents, and ministry. We are God's chosen people for the means reaching the world for Jesus Christ. The call of God on Paul's life is also the call of God on our lives. Our text tells us that just as Paul was chosen "by the will of God" (verse 1) to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to "fully carry out the preaching of the Word" (verse 25) – we also are to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ by seeking to grow deeper in our walk with God and living out our faith in Jesus Christ. "*Him WE proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that WE may present everyone mature in Christ*" (Colossians 1:28). WE have been called with Paul to proclaim Christ. This is our call at ABC: *We passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people.* In God's Word this morning Paul tells us the six motivations that drove him to fulfill his calling to proclaim and share Jesus Christ.

1) Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ because he was joyfully passionate about following Jesus. "Now I rejoice." We are passionate about those things that give us the most joy. Paul was passionate about following Jesus because Jesus was his greatest joy. For those of us who claim Jesus as Lord and Savior, the source of all of our joy must be first and foremost in Jesus. Joy in Jesus is not something we feel but rather an explosion that begins deep within our souls and affects every fiber of our being. Joy in Jesus begins when we first meet him at the cross, which then grows as we come to know him and as we walk with him through life. This was the experience King David wrote of in Psalms 16:11: "*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*" Paul proclaimed Jesus because he was passionately joyful about following Jesus.

2) Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ because he wanted to share in the sufferings of Jesus. *“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.”* Paul was no stranger to pain and persecution. When He surrendered to God and gave his life to Christ he moved from being a prosecutor to being prosecuted. Jesus said: *“A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you”* (John 15:20).

When we proclaim the joy of the gospel of Jesus Christ we will experience struggle, pain and suffering. Paul tells us that in Romans 8:16-18: *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* If we are truly following Jesus we will suffer.

*“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.”* Paul was not saying here that he was experiencing something that was lacking in Christ's afflictions. What he was saying is that the church, as Christ's body, has a corporate relationship that they share with Jesus. And if we share in his death and resurrection, we also share in his sufferings: *“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,”* (Philippians 1:29). In the same way, those who are called to be pastors and preachers, who are called to be Christ's representatives, are also called to share in Christ's life and Christ's death and Christ's resurrection - and in Christ's sufferings.

Paul rejoiced in his sufferings for the sake of the church by being filled up with what was lacking in Christ's afflictions in the church - because God offers Himself through Jesus Christ to the world by offering Himself as a sufferer for the world through his church, his body, his people – a people who, like Jesus, are willing to suffer for the world. The suffering in love, mercy and grace of Christ for lost sinners is seen in the suffering in love, mercy and grace of *his people for lost and saved sinners*. This is how we, as the church are to proclaim Jesus Christ as we walk together in the power and joy of Jesus. Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ because he wanted to share Jesus through his sufferings with Jesus.

3) Paul also proclaimed Jesus Christ because he wanted to fully give himself to serving Jesus. *“For the sake of his body, that is, the church, 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 tells us here that he did not volunteer to become a minister of Jesus Christ; he was appointed and ordained by God Himself to be a servant of the precious truth of the Word of God. Though each and every one of us is called by God to serve God in His church - Paul was entrusted with the special task and goal *“to make the word of God fully known.”* This is the responsibility of every pastor called by God. We are to teach and preach the *whole* Bible, even those parts that are not very popular. Paul himself spoke of this in Acts 20:27 when he was leaving the elders of Ephesus: *“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* It's been said a pastor's job is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. I would disagree – that's the Holy Spirit's job. My responsibility is to God, and I must be true to the principles and truths of His Word regardless of whether I or anyone else feels comforted or afflicted. Hebrews 4:12: *“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* Paul proclaimed Christ because he wanted to fully give himself to serving Jesus by making God's Word fully known.

4) Paul also proclaimed Jesus Christ because he trusted in the promises of God. *“The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 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”* here is how God would fulfill God's promise to Abraham: *“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen 12:1-3).

The Jews of Paul's day would be asking the questions: "How would God make Abraham's name great? How would Abraham's descendants become a great nation? How would all the families of the earth be blessed through Abraham's family? In Paul's day these questions still had not been clearly answered. It was still a mystery to the nation of Israel. But Paul proclaimed that God had solved that mystery. The "mystery" revealed to Paul, which the saints came to know when Paul made "*the word of God fully known*" - was that by God's abundant mercy and undeserved grace, God sent the promised Messiah through the great nation of Abraham's descendants so He might bless the Jews *and all the nations* with the promised Messiah. "*The hope of glory*" - God's plan to send a savior to deliver God's people - was for the Jews *and the Gentiles* (for us) from the very beginning! And know most assuredly that when Paul proclaimed that "*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*" - know that the Jewish Christians would have been outraged. They considered themselves to be *the* chosen people, not the Gentiles.

But Paul tells them here that it had always been God's intended purpose to include the Gentiles. God's promise is for *all* whom He chooses. The Jewish Christians were then faced with the reality that the God they were putting their hope in, was a much bigger God than they wanted Him to be. This is why Paul could write, "*So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy*" (Romans 9:16). Because it is so, we who are not Jewish, who are not of the nation of Israel, possess the promises of God. Christ in us - the hope of glory! Amen! Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ because he trusted in the promise that Jesus would be "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" for *all* people.

5) Paul also proclaimed Jesus Christ because *he wanted to fulfill the purpose of the gospel*. "*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ*." Here again we see the word "*proclaim*." In verse 23 Paul used it in regard to publicly preaching the gospel - here he uses it regarding teaching/preaching the gospel for growth/maturity. This connects with what Paul wrote earlier: "*From the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*" (Colossians 1:9-10). The church's proclaiming is to not be a program but the person of Jesus Christ, "*HIM we proclaim!*" Proclaiming in the church - "*warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom*" - is to be done in two ways. *Personal* proclaiming, like mentoring and exhorting one another to know and live out God's Word and the gospel; and *corporate* proclaiming like preaching and teaching on Sunday, and in weekly Bible studies/shepherd groups.

Notice the phrase "*everyone*" is used three times in this verse, which means *everyone* of us needs to be personally and corporately warned and publicly taught for the purpose "*that we may present everyone mature in Christ*." What does it mean to be "*mature in Christ*"? In context, Paul's purpose was that those in the church would be so "*mature in Christ*" that they would not be influenced or swayed by the false beliefs that were being taught in the church. God's Word tells us here the purpose of the church is to proclaim the gospel in a manner that leads those who hear it to grow into a maturity of faith that reflects the heart and character and work of Jesus Christ - which is the main ministry of the church - which is *to make disciples*. This is not just accomplished by people coming to a faith and coming to church, but also by teaching, training, mentoring and serving - Christ in you, the hope of glory!

6) Lastly, Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ because *he was enabled by power of Jesus*. "*For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*." The word "*toil*" here in the Greek means "to work to the point of exhaustion." Paul is telling us that he has done everything God has called him to do to help people come to know Christ, to grow in Christ, and to show Christ. The key is that he does not rely on his own human ingenuity or strength, but on Christ who lives within him. When the apostle speaks of "*struggle*" here he is speaking of both maximum *expenditure of human effort* ("*I toil*") and maximum *dependence on the mighty divine power of God* ("*with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*"). Paul proclaimed the gospel of Jesus by power of Jesus.

*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, 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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:1-3*

Now we know that Paul is in prison as he is writing these things. And we know he was “*struggling*” in prayer for those in the church – and he was probably also “*struggling*” with writing and teaching and preaching and leading those in the church into an ever more mature faith in Jesus and in a deeper walk with God. And Paul tells us the reason he brings this to their attention was so “*that their hearts may be encouraged.*” The word “*encouraged*” here literally means “to call alongside, exhort and strengthen.” The word “*heart*” here in the Greek and Hebrew culture refers to the deep core, center part of the human created being that initiates and motivates. Paul is exhorting those in the church to embrace Jesus Christ in their “*hearts*” - in the deep core, center of their lives, as the greatest passion of their lives. Paul spoke of this back in Colossians 1:18 when he wrote that spiritual maturity begins when we see and embrace Jesus as being “*preeminent*” in “*everything*”.

And Paul also tells us here that when Jesus is “*preeminent*” in “*everything*” we will then be united in love: “*that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love.*” Imagine a church full of those kinds of hearts - a whole community of faith where “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” is alive and thriving, as each and every heart sees Jesus as being so “*preeminent*” in “*everything*” that everyone’s heart and life are woven together in God’s love. Paul is telling us here that when our hearts are truly captured by Christ, we will love one another. This fits with what Jesus said, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35).

Paul desired that the Colossians understand and possess a genuine conviction and passion for God’s love that would manifest itself in active, mutual love for one another. Paul is reminding the Colossians, he is reminding us, that faith without love is not faith but rather just an emotional feeling. Instead Paul exhorts them, exhorts us, to realize that while it is by God’s gift of faith alone that we are saved, that genuine faith always manifests itself in the response of love for one another. Spiritual maturity will be lived out in the church by those who are so in love with Jesus that they love each other.

Paul tells us that we need that kind of love for one another “*to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*” The context of the entire book of Colossians flows out of Paul’s concern that he is very much aware of how easy it is to miss “*the mystery . . . the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” of Christ - *by being misled by false teaching.* But Paul tells us that the more we love one another, the more we can be fully assured that we understand and know and treasure who Jesus is.

This is the reality of our faith in Jesus Christ. We can only live in *communion* with God when we live in *community* together for God. A “*full assurance of understanding*” of God and the “*knowledge of God's mystery*” in Christ comes not just from personal study, but also from corporate loving. In the words of Burk Parson: “Community squeezes out self-centeredness.” The only way we can corporately know “*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” of Jesus is by proclaiming who Jesus is and what Jesus is doing in our individuals lives with each other. It been said that “the church is a bunch of people who know how miserable the core of their hearts are, and how desperately they need a Savior, and how much they really need each other.” Only when our hearts are knitted together in love can we truly understand and treasure Jesus – which will cause us to proclaim Christ in us, the hope of glory!

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

Colossians 2:4-5

Paul is telling us he had been praying that Jesus would be so preeminent in the hearts of those in the church; so they would be united together in love; which would help them fully understand, know and treasure Jesus; which would then make them so mature in their faith and walk with Jesus that they would *not believe* the false teachings of false teachers about Jesus and their faith in Jesus: *“I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.”* This was and is and always will be one of the major struggles all Christians face. The Greek word for *“plausible”* means “to reason beside something.” If our target is the truth of God, then know there will something *alongside* of the truth of God that looks very much like the truth of God but is not the truth of God. A favorite weapon of the devil is to get us to focus on what is *beside or like the truth of God*, rather than the *real* truth of God. To be deluded *“with plausible arguments”* means to think you know that something is right, but it’s really wrong. All lies are based on and contain some truth. Truth and error can look almost the same, but one is a counterfeit. We live in days when this is true of almost everything. Plastic looks like metal, cardboard looks like wood, paper looks like cloth. Almost all movies, videos and television programs today are generated in some part by computers; much of what we watch is not real. 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 was concerned about for the church.

We live in a day when *“plausible arguments”* have caused us to redefine sin. While the Bible defines sin as any failure to conform to truths of God in action, attitude, or nature — the world, and often even the church, defines sin in terms of illness, dysfunction, ignorance, entitlement, victimization, inability or misunderstanding – and then we decide which of these definitions fits our situation, which then removes any personal responsibility. But King David said to God: *“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment”* (Psalm 51:4). We all desperately need to understand this because while we commonly believe our actions and behaviours flow out of our opinions and beliefs - decades of studies on human behavior and research in social science reveal the exact opposite is true. Dr. Mark McMinn writes that, “More often than not, we first observe our behaviours and then craft our beliefs and opinions to be consistent with those behaviours. In other words, we justify what we have already decided or done by changing our beliefs. King David knew that: *“Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”* (Psalm 19:12-14).

In Psalm 19 and in our text today God is telling us that we can know the clear difference between what is fact or fiction, truth or false - when we look through the filter of the essential and unchangeable truth of God, in the Word of God, who was with God, who was God, who was the Word; who became flesh and dwelt among us, revealing to us his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth; which is also the Word of God that is proclaimed every Sunday morning and proclaimed in Shepherd Groups during the week - to reset the spiritual compass of our souls to once again point preeminently to the true north of Jesus Christ, as we make our way down the winding path of life that leads us through a fallen world full of plausible arguments during the week, which will crumble and dissipate when we proclaim, preach, teach, share, read, study and memorize the Word of God, reminding us of who God truly is and what God truth promises and proclaims; the Word of God in the gospel, that proclaims the Mystery of God - which is Christ in you, the hope of glory! *“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).