



## Part 5

# SUCH A GREAT MYSTERY

June 27, 2010

Pastor Chris Lawson

This weekend we continue our series in Colossians by looking at Colossians 1:24-2:5. Last week we looked at the implications of being reconciled and this week we pick back up by looking at what Paul says about himself. In particular, we will examine Paul's view of his own credentials and qualifications as an apostle, his sense of calling, and how he viewed his own suffering. We will also talk about how we can rejoice in our suffering; God's mysteries; and how it is that we are never alone. It will be a great day!

Questions For Further Study are available at the Welcome Center and at [www.reynoldachurch.org](http://www.reynoldachurch.org).

Blessings,  
Pastor Chris

## COLOSSIANS CHAPTER ONE (English Standard Version)

**C**<sup>24</sup> 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,<sup>25</sup> 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,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.<sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

## COLOSSIANS CHAPTER TWO (English Standard Version)

<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.<sup>5</sup> 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.

### Today's Scriptures

Judges 6; 1 Samuel 17:47; Job 2:9; Matthew 12:1-13; 24:36; Mark 13:32;  
John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7; Romans 14:17; 15:13; Galatians 5:19-23; Ephesians 1:17-8; 3:4;  
Philippians 4:4; Colossians 1:24-2:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 4:13

*Often as we begin to gain a sense of the experience others have gained  
by their struggles and successes,  
we consider them qualified to speak into our own lives,  
just as we have with the apostle Paul.*

**Let us pray,**

*God I thank You that as we dig through the book of Colossians together we see new and deeper facets of how profound your Gospel is. It is in Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.*

**T**oday I have good news: After four weeks in the first chapter of Colossians, we will finally move into chapter two!

I am an avid reader and I enjoy a variety of genres of books. In particular, I love to read biographies. Through a biography I am able to move beyond being a superficial observer of an individual into a deeper understanding of the private struggles, pain and successes that impacted his or her life. In these narratives, I am especially drawn to pieces of information which would not otherwise be known about a person without reading their biography.

For example:

There was a drama student who had great aspirations of one day becoming a Hollywood actress, so she enrolled in drama school, yet was soon dismissed. Her academic record read: *She is too shy to put her best foot forward.* That woman was Lucille Ball.

In 1962 the Decca recording company listened to a simple demo tape and dismissed it with the comment, *We don't really like their sound, and we think guitar music is on the way out.* That band was The Beatles. (Someone was fired for that one!)

This man's fiancé had died; he failed at several business ventures; he lost his eighth consecutive election; and suffered a nervous breakdown. That man later came to be known as President Abraham Lincoln.

Thomas Edison's teacher told him he was too stupid to do anything; that he should go into a field

where he could succeed by virtue of his great personality.

And Michael Jordan, the beloved Tar Heel and greatest basketball player to ever live, was cut from his high school basketball team for being too short.

**O**ften as we begin to gain a sense of the experience others have gained by their struggles and successes, we consider them qualified to speak into our own lives, just as we have with the apostle Paul.

In our weeks of studying the book of Colossians together we established Paul as the author of this letter to a young church in the city of Colossae. We were introduced to Paul's traveling friend, Timothy; we reviewed the historical background of the letter; talked about the city of Colossae; and learned that Paul had not actually been there, that most likely the church there had been established by Epaphras, who had come to faith in Jesus under the preaching ministry of Paul while Paul was in Ephesus.

In verse fifteen of chapter one, we began to see evidence of why Paul wrote to this church that he did not know, that while Epaphras was visiting with Paul at the time he was in house prison in Rome, he shared with Paul a rising heresy in Colossae. We concluded this heresy was from several sources, among which was the idea that Jesus was not God; that He was merely human. This arose from a prevailing belief in Colossae that spirit was good and matter was evil; that because Jesus was made of matter in His human form, He could never be God because matter was evil; and that if God and spirit are good, how could God ever create something that was evil?

In verses fifteen through twenty, we saw Jesus defended, defined, and exalted above the Cosmos. Paul established that not only is Jesus God, but He is fully sufficient for salvation; He is firstborn among creation; and He has dominion over all of that

creation. We learned with great amazement that through the power of His shed blood and resurrection, this cosmic Savior not only redeemed our broken souls and our broken bodies, but He is in the midst of reconciling to Himself ALL of creation, EVERYTHING that has been corroded by sin.

## A CALLING

In that context we pick up today in verse twenty-four, with a glimpse into Paul's own story, his autobiography. Shifting from all he has established to new thoughts, He wrote:

*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,<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God ...*

In the English Standard Version verse twenty-five reads, *of which I **became** a minister*, but in the New King James translation the verse is translated, *I was **made** a minister according to the stewardship from God*. This echoes what Paul said in chapter one, verse one of this same book, *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...* Paul seemed to be making a distinction here between a *calling* and a *job*, as if he knew he had no choice, that God chose him, and in much the same way a potter transforms a lump of clay, God chose him and designed him to be an apostle.

Paul had made his choice of something that was not in any way honoring to God. We read in Acts nine that Paul's chosen vocation was to kill Christians, but then, on the way to Damascus, God changed him. God blinded him with a light, knocked down everybody around him, changed his heart and made him a minister. And remarkably, after Paul experienced God's transforming call on his life, he began to use his transformation to illustrate the difference between a *job* and a *calling*.

Have you ever had a job you hated? I've had a couple. For about three months in college, I waited tables. I was working part-time as a youth minister and didn't have a lot of time, so I thought I would wait tables in a place called *Little Italy* in Bluefield, Virginia. About three weeks after I quit it closed, and I take full credit for that.

I thought waiting tables would be something I would love, because I would be able to talk with people, and the better our conversation, the more they would tip me. Well, it turned out that many

*If each of us  
could consider our work as a calling,  
we would see ourselves  
as having been placed  
inside of God's larger creative design.  
Then, even if it were difficult  
to get up each day and work at a job  
that did not seem to be fulfilling,  
we could work with the awareness  
that God placed us there  
in order for His glory  
to be known in that place.*

hungry people are quite foul. They complain; they plant hairs in their food so they can get it for free; and they are rude in a variety of other ways. So I hated waiting tables. I just couldn't wait to quit. I committed to work there for three months for the summer, and as soon as I had opportunity, I was out of there, never to wait tables again. Waiting tables is not a bad job. Many are called to wait tables, but I was NOT.

I think about that job in comparison to the job my Dad has. My Dad works in a large factory, and on the surface it seems like a pretty normal job. But when I was seventeen or so, I remember asking him:

*Dad, you have done this for twenty years. Why do you keep doing it?*

I don't remember his exact words, but I do remember leaving that conversation with the realization that my Dad believed God had created him to be God's light in that place.

If each of us could consider our work in light of God's design for us to subdue the earth, we would

*The LORD caused the men throughout the camp  
to turn on each other with their swords.  
The battle belongs to the LORD!*

see the work as a *calling*, that which we were created to do, rather than as a *job*, something of task and necessity. We would see ourselves as having been placed inside of God's larger creative design, and we would know that God created us so that His glory might be known. Then, even if it were difficult to get up each day and work at a job that did not seem to be fulfilling, we could work with the awareness that God placed us there in order for His glory to be known in that place.

## FULL GLORY TO GOD

That is the language Paul used in Colossians. God *made me* an apostle. I chose to do something else, but God made me so that His glory might be manifest in this place through His work in me. Paul gave full glory to God. We tend to miss Paul's remarkable level of humility in readily relinquishing any claim to his own works or righteousness.

Let's look at this story of Paul in light of the story of Gideon from the book of Judges.<sup>1</sup> Judges was written for us to see how God has worked throughout history. God did not want to give the people a king such as other nations had, because He was their King, so He gave them judges.

Deborah was the great judge before Gideon. She reconciled the people to their foreign neighbors, and led them back to worship of God and obedience to the law. As a result, they once again benefited from the benevolence and favor of God.

Yet when Deborah died, just as we see repeatedly in the Old Testament, the people immediately strayed and returned to their worship of other gods. So God raised up Gideon, a very young man from an otherwise unremarkable clan of the tribe of Manasseh, and He began an amazing work through him.

The Midianites were raising a huge army. Most sources estimate this army at about 100,000, whereas Gideon's army numbered three hundred. The Midianites were going to win by sheer numbers.

Gideon was facing what would seem to be an impossible hurdle, but God intervened in a way that only God could. One night God sent Gideon to spy on the Midianite camp. He hid behind a tent and overheard a man who was telling his dream to his comrade, who interpreted the dream saying,

*<sup>14</sup> This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.* (NIV)

So God gave Gideon a glimpse of what He was going to do, and of course this encouraged Gideon's heart. It was good news to hear his enemy talking about losing, right?! Gideon immediately worshiped the Lord, then returned to the camp of Israel, divided the men into three companies, put into the hands of all of them trumpets and torches inside of empty jars. He then spoke to them:

*<sup>17</sup> 'Watch me,' he told them. 'Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. <sup>18</sup> When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'*

*<sup>19</sup> Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. <sup>20</sup> The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars.*

This isn't the way to fight a war, with a flashlight in one hand and a musical instrument in the other, right? If you are going into war you pick up a sword.

*Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!'*

It seems ironic that they would yell, *a sword*, when they were holding a flashlight and a trumpet!

*<sup>21</sup> While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran,*

*They ran from people holding flashlights and musical instruments!*

*... crying out as they fled.*

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 6

<sup>22</sup> *When the three hundred trumpets sounded – now this is the best part of the story – the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords.*

God, in the way that only God can, had the one hundred thousand men defeat each other, and we are reminded of David's proclamation to Goliath many years later: ... *the battle belongs to the LORD!*<sup>2</sup>

God powerfully revealed Himself to Gideon because of Gideon's humility and his reliance on God.

## SUFFERING FOR THE GOSPEL

This week as I was reading the story of Paul, who was once an enemy of God, but was then transformed and totally reliant on God, I began to get a glimpse of Paul's own humility. Yet Paul did not seem very humble when he said,

<sup>24</sup> *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, - get this – and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body.*

I have always been taught that there is nothing lacking in Jesus, so how is it that this humble man can say he was filling up the afflictions that are lacking in Christ Jesus?

I spent most of my week on this point, and found first that the Greek word for *affliction* is never used in Scripture when connected to the suffering of Jesus or the atonement of sin. I concluded that Paul, who knew atonement language, was referring to something different when he chose to say *filling up the afflictions* instead of *filling up the suffering*. When I read *afflictions* my mind immediately went to *suffering*, and I wondered how Paul was filling up Jesus' suffering. Then I realized that Paul made a decision to use a different word here because he was making a different point.

Many people loved Jesus, so they followed Him and gathered around Him to hear His teachings. Yet many hated Jesus, and they also were followers.

When Jesus and His disciples were walking through the field on the Sabbath, His hungry disciples picked grains of wheat to eat, and the Pharisees were right there to accuse them of

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*Scripture is abundantly clear*

*that it is solely*

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*that we are able to be filled with joy,*

*because joy*

*is a fruit of the Spirit.*

breaking the Sabbath law.<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees and other dissenters were continually trying to catch Him doing something against God's law in order to disqualify Him as the Son of God. It did not take any time at all for the Pharisees to show up and condemn Him for anything controversial because they were with Him, waiting to destroy Him.

That is why when it came to Jesus being crucified, they had to hold an illegal trial, with no basis, and put Him to death. There was no blemish against the Son of God. (*But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*) Colossians 1:22

This explains why Paul could say that he was filling up the afflictions that are lacking in Christ Jesus. He was telling the Colossians that Jesus had done all He needed to do, again emphasizing Jesus' complete sufficiency for salvation, but because He returned to heaven and is no longer here, the people who hated Jesus would also hate them, His Church. They would *fill up the afflictions that are lacking*, not because Jesus is lacking in anything, but because He was not there to suffer the afflictions anymore. All the afflictions that are lacking – all the ones that were not given to Him – would be directed at His Church.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 17:47

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 12:1-13

*In a real way, our suffering brings us into unity with Christ  
because we know He loves us and His suffering was for us. He never deserved it.  
He lived a life we could never live, set a perfect example,  
suffered all the temptation we could ever suffer,  
and in the midst of that, He had joy.*

## REJOICE IN YOUR SUFFERING

Once Paul clearly explained the suffering the Church would encounter because people would not like this Gospel which tells them the only way to know God is through Jesus, he followed with a remarkable statement of instruction for coping with that suffering: *Rejoice in your suffering*.

Everything in us fights against rejoicing in our suffering, but Paul explicitly instructed us to do so. That is not to say that he is in any way instructing Christians to *seek out* suffering. There are religious traditions within the Christian sphere, such as the *Opus Dei* of Roman Catholicism, which tell us we should seek out suffering, that we bring suffering on ourselves in order to come into unity with Christ, but that is unbiblical. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that Christians who come into unity with Christ should seek out suffering.

Yet that does not change the fact that we do suffer.

Not only did Paul instruct Christians to rejoice in their suffering, but in a more emphatic statement to the church in Philippi, he said, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, 'Rejoice.'*<sup>4</sup> I could not help but wonder what were Paul's circumstances when he wrote that?

Although it is clear that Paul was under house arrest in Rome when he wrote to the Philippians, (as he was when he wrote to the Colossians), he was referencing his own experiences during his travels through Philippi and imprisonment there. (Paul spent a lot of time in prisons). We know from archaeological evidence that in Philippi there was a

huge prison. In that prison there was a HUGE hole in the ground, which most contend was about 40 feet by 40 feet, and the city sewer line ran through it. When people would come under the wrath of the government, they were dropped into the hole, and when it filled with prisoners, the authorities would open up the sewer line to flood it. Once the people were dead, the authorities would drain the sewage, empty the prison, and start over again.

How is it possible that when reflecting upon living in a prison set up like the one in Philippi, Paul could dare say to rejoice in suffering? How is that possible? How does that statement have any continuity with Scripture itself?

It is because the root of the word *rejoice* is *joy*, and Scripture is abundantly clear that it is solely through the infilling of the Holy Spirit that we are able to be filled with joy, because joy is a fruit of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Once you are redeemed, you have the capacity for joy, because it is something only God can give.

## WE CAN REJOICE IN SUFFERING BECAUSE ...

### *Suffering Brings Us Into Unity With Christ*

In a real way, our suffering brings us into unity with Christ because we know He loves us and His suffering was for us. He never deserved it. He lived a life we could never live, set a perfect example, suffered all the temptation we could ever suffer, and in the midst of that, He had joy. And when I am

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 4:4

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 14:17; 15:13; Galatians 5:22;  
1 Thessalonians 1:6

suffering I know God will be redemptive in that. He did not send it; it is redemptive.

### *Suffering Is A Reminder of the Assurance of Our Salvation*

The enemy said to Job through his wife, *Curse God and die!*<sup>6</sup> And likewise, the world says when you suffer you should become bitter and curse God. Those who do not know the deep love of Jesus do not have a mechanism for suffering with joy, so they often become angry and frustrated. What else do they have?

#### **We do not grieve as those who do not have hope**

As the redeemed, we can rejoice in our suffering because of Jesus, for although we suffer and grieve, we do not grieve as those who do not have the hope He has given us.<sup>7</sup> We have been given the perspective of a much greater picture.

#### **We have the evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit**

We can rejoice in our suffering, not because the suffering is good – suffering is always suffering – but because through the work of Jesus we have the capacity to deal with this world and its suffering by the power of the Holy Spirit. If it weren't for the Spirit, we would not have the capacity to be gentle, faithful, self-controlled, or joyful. The world has no capacity for understanding what the fruit of the Spirit truly looks like, no capacity for what it truly looks like to be gentle, faithful, self-controlled, or joyful. These are the fruit of a redeemed heart, as opposed to the fruit an unredeemed heart produces.<sup>8</sup>

#### **We have the hope of eternal life**

Those of us who have been granted new life through Jesus have the hope of eternal life. We know that our current circumstances are not the end of the story.

It has been about a year and a half since Merri and I lost our child to a miscarriage. That was tough. It is the toughest thing I have ever been through. We went to the doctor that day for our first ultrasound to see the baby's heartbeat, and the person who had the

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<sup>6</sup> Job 2:9

<sup>7</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 5:19-23

*We do not rejoice*

**because** *we are suffering.*

*We rejoice because we are able*

*to have joy in the suffering,*

*and to the world that becomes*

*a testimony of God's faithfulness.*

*We give the glory to God*

*and we give God's glory to the world.*

*That is our testimony.*

worst job in the world at that moment, the OB/GYN, told us they did not see a heartbeat. We grieved.

But somewhat soon our hearts turned towards this posture: *What a wonderful deposit we have made in heaven*, because when you have the joy of the Lord, you don't grieve as people who do not have hope. When we get to heaven one day, after we push Peter out of the way for taking up the whole gate, and after we hug Jesus for getting us there, we are going to go find the child whom we lost on this earth but who is in heaven awaiting us.

So having joy while suffering is an affirmation of our salvation.

### *Others See our Testimony and Come to Saving Faith*

We do not rejoice *because* we are suffering. That is not what Paul was saying. We rejoice because we are able to have joy *in* the suffering, and to the world that becomes a testimony of God's faithfulness.

That we have any capacity at all to be joyful, or to overcome our suffering, means that we have been renewed in spirit, and that is a testimony to others of our life in Jesus.

*The enemy's whole plan is to frustrate you, to drive a wedge  
between you and your God in heaven,  
to make you question your faith, to destroy you.*

*When you are rejoicing in your suffering instead of cursing God,  
dying in the natural, but thriving in the spirit,  
it frustrates him. That is good.  
One day Jesus will throw him into the pit.*

When others see you walk through cancer and still trust God, it becomes a testimony to the power of His Gospel.

When they see you being gentle with your children when they deserve your wrath, it becomes a testimony to the world that God is at work in your life.

We give the glory to God and we give God's glory to the world. That is our testimony.

God created us to give Him glory. And as the Spirit works in us and produces the fruit that only the Spirit can produce, it becomes a testimony of what God has done in our lives and an affirmation that our hearts have been renewed.

### *Our Joy In Suffering Gives God The Glory and Frustrates The Enemy*

Our joy frustrates the devil. Any time we can frustrate the enemy it is good news for the world. His whole plan is to frustrate you, to drive a wedge between you and your God in heaven, to make you question your faith, to destroy you. When you are rejoicing in your suffering instead of cursing God, dying in the natural, but thriving in the spirit, it frustrates him. That is good. One day Jesus will throw him into the pit.

And so, do not seek suffering, but when it comes, know that God is for you. Isn't it good news that you don't have to suffer by yourself?

## **GOD'S MYSTERIES**

<sup>26</sup> *the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.* <sup>27</sup> *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.* <sup>28</sup> *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.* <sup>29</sup> *For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

Paul uses the words *ages and generations* here to mean years and people. For many years and for many people God has hidden this mystery.

Mystery is used three ways in Scripture.

### **Unrevealed Mysteries**

God never reveals when He will return. So if you turn on your TV today and somebody is trying to tell you that they figured out when Jesus is going to return, change the channel, because Jesus was very clear that only God the Father knows when this will happen.<sup>9</sup> You do not know. I promise you that Jesus did not put some obscure math code in the Bible so that if you are smart enough to figure it out you know the date He is returning. That is not the way it works.

The Father has not revealed to anyone when Jesus will return.

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32

## Mysteries Revealed to Certain People

In the Old Testament God revealed a measure of His benevolence to a certain group of people, Israel, and kept it hidden from everyone else.

## Mystery Fulfilled in Jesus

But now, Paul said, the mystery has been revealed to everyone. Jesus is that mystery. That which was hidden in the Old Testament – for many years and for many people – has now been revealed in full in Jesus, and to all who were the least likely to have been the recipients of Jesus, as implied by Paul in his use of the word, *Gentiles*.

Place this in the context of Paul's concern for Colossae. We formerly talked about the secret societies in Colossae during Paul's time. No one spoke about either the societies or their secrets, if they knew them, because those were the first rules of the societies. And so it was a direct shot at the mystery religions for Paul to state that there were no longer any secrets, and all the mysteries had been revealed in Jesus.

Two verses about this mystery from Ephesians.

### **Ephesians 1:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,* <sup>18</sup> *having the eyes of your hearts enlightened* (ESV)

That which was once hidden from you has now been revealed to you.

### **Ephesians 3:4**

<sup>4</sup> *When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ*

Paul is speaking directly into the heresy of Colossae.

So Paul established his credentials, provided instruction for living a life that is honoring to God, and announced that THE mystery has been revealed to us in full in Jesus.

## KNIT BY THE SPIRIT

### **COLOSSIANS CHAPTER TWO**

<sup>1</sup> *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,* <sup>2</sup> *that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love,...*

A pop culture reference called *seven degrees of Kevin Bacon*, asserts that any famous person can be connected back to Kevin Bacon through seven steps. So Kevin Bacon knows this person who knows this person who knows this person ... and when you complete seven steps, everybody is connected back to Kevin Bacon. A similar theory, known as *Six Degrees of Separation*, is not nearly as fun as the Kevin Bacon reference. The idea, also known as *the human web*, is that everyone is in some way connected to everybody in the world through six steps; that we are such an interconnected world that everybody eventually through a series of steps could see how they are connected to any particular person.

It is interesting that Paul uses the term, *knit together*, because in a very real way all of the redeemed are interconnected with all other people around the world because our spirits are connected by the Holy Spirit. This is why we pray for missionaries we do not know, because though we do not *know* them, we know *about* them; though we couldn't recognize them if they walked into a room, we know them in the spirit because there is common Spirit work within each of us. And so Paul essentially said to the Colossians, I know I have not been there yet, but I *know you*. We are knit together by the Spirit of God. Thus when we pray for those whom we do not know, we pray as people who have been given the Spirit of unity, *knit together*.

## A HERETICAL REMINDER

Paul continues once again with a reminder to the Colossians of the revelation of God's mystery,

<sup>2</sup> *... to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,* <sup>3</sup> *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* <sup>4</sup> *I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.* <sup>5</sup> *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.*

Paul states that all wisdom and knowledge has been revealed in Christ. Sometime this week read that verse in light of Proverbs eight, which personifies wisdom and knowledge. It is a foretelling of what will happen when wisdom and knowledge are fully revealed in Jesus. Here Paul revealed the fulfillment of the Proverbs eight allusion by saying Jesus is that personification, He is wisdom and knowledge come to earth. And Paul

*In the Christian church we too quickly  
treat other religious traditions  
in a cavalier manner.  
We toss them off  
as something not to be taken seriously,  
and in so doing  
we are also cavalier  
with the enemy that is behind them.  
There is a real fight going on  
for the souls of people.*

revealed this here because of his next statement, *in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments*. If I were writing that statement, I would have not said *plausible* argument; I would have said *foolish* argument. But by the power of the Holy Spirit Paul chose to say *plausible* argument.

It is interesting that Paul first *acknowledged* competing theories so that he might *discredit* competing theories. In the Christian church we too quickly treat other religious traditions in a cavalier manner. We toss them off as something not to be taken seriously, and in so doing we are also cavalier with the enemy that is behind them. There is a real fight going on for the souls of people.

Paul acknowledged there are plausible arguments, and because they are plausible, because it is possible that a right-thinking person might believe them, the only response is Jesus.

All fullness and knowledge are in Jesus, and if anything contradicts the fullness and knowledge of Jesus, then it is not of God. Paul wanted the people in Colossae to understand, and we at Reynolda must also, that there is ONE line of demarcation for consideration of ANY ideologies which compete with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus:

Does it agree with the fullness of wisdom and of knowledge that are revealed in Jesus, or does it not?

That is the only firm place we can stand. All of history has been revealing the fullness of knowledge and of wisdom that are in Jesus. He is a mystery no more.

## NEVER ALONE

Returning to Colossians chapter two:

<sup>1</sup> *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,* <sup>2</sup> *that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love ...*

Paul through the Spirit chose to use the word *encourage* here in lieu of any other. The root of this word is *paraclete* in the Greek, and some version of *paraclete* is used in Scripture 109 times. In John fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, it is the same word used for the Holy Spirit:

### John 14:26

*But the Helper – the Paraclete – the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

### John 15:26-27

*But when the Helper – the Paraclete – comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.<sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*

Now, one of my favorite texts in Scripture,

### John 16:7

[Jesus speaking] *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, ...*

Can you imagine what that sounded like to His disciples? What do you mean it is to *my advantage* that You go away?

Here is why: ... *for if I do not go away, the Helper – the Paraclete – will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*

And now, Paul has said it is still not up to you. Be encouraged and be strengthened, by the power of the Spirit. That is remarkable. It is amazing that Paul has gone through all the painstaking steps of establishing the qualifications of the Gospel he has been preaching to the world, and then he says,

*Jesus is wisdom and knowledge come to earth.*

*And there is ONE line of demarcation for consideration of ANY ideologies  
which compete with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus:*

Does it agree with the fullness of wisdom and of knowledge  
that are revealed in Jesus,  
or does it not?

*That is the only firm place we can stand.*

*be encouraged*, not by means of your own mind, your own intellect, or your own discernment, but by the Spirit.

And I am reminded of the same truth over and over and over again, the truth that Paul has given to the church at Colossae: God has brought you too far to not give you a Helper now to take you the rest of the way.

This is good news for us, that wherever you are, God has too much invested in revealing Himself through Jesus in order to get you to this point, to ever leave you alone now. So Paul writes to this young church a profound word, that even when you think you are alone, be encouraged by the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

**S**o lest you ever think you are alone, or that it is over; lest you ever want to curse God and die; lest you ever think the mounting bills, the irreconcilable marriage; the wayward kids; the lost family member, are just too much anymore, God says,

*I have brought you here; I will never leave you. I have left so that I might send a Helper, and He is always walking with you. He is going to manifest Himself in your life in so many ways you will never be able to believe it. When you feel alone, He will manifest Himself. When you feel abandoned, He will manifest Himself. When you feel at whit's end, He will manifest Himself.*

The Holy Spirit, through miraculous signs of God, will manifest Himself so that you will NEVER think you are alone.

So today, how does the Paraclete need to meet you? Jesus said He had to go so that He could send Him. In what way do you need the Great Helper to make Himself known to you today?

*God, it is good news that as I look at my own life, from where You have brought me to where I am, I have hope that where I am is not where I will end up. So today God, we ask You as your people to manifest yourself to us in a new way. Whatever it is that is causing us to suffer, let us by the power of your Spirit have joy and break the bondage of that today, Lord. Make yourself known. Reveal yourself.*

*God we thank You that You love us so much. We thank You that while we were lost, You saved us, and that once You saved us, You were never done with us and set us forth toward a great destiny, empowered by Your Spirit.*

*Thank You in Jesus' name. AMEN*

**W**e never want to end a service without giving you the opportunity to accept Jesus as your Savior. It is good news to know that God does not leave you to make it on your own. While you were a sinner running from God, God sent His only Son to make Himself known to you so that you may live a life empowered by His Spirit and free from all the penalty of your sin.

So today, if you have never accepted Jesus, let today be the day. God wants to do a good work in you. He has brought you too far to leave you where you are.

*God has too much invested in revealing Himself through Jesus  
in order to get you to this point, to ever leave you alone now.  
The Holy Spirit, through miraculous signs of God, will manifest Himself  
so that you will NEVER think you are alone.*

As you leave today, leave knowing that your God and your church love you.

Let me send you out with a blessing.

May God the Father,  
Who created you for a great destiny,  
And Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God,  
Who died in your place for your sin,  
And the Holy Spirit,  
The Paraclete,  
Who came that He might empower you to live in this world,  
And set you free,  
Be with you now and always.

And all God's people said, AMEN!

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