



Sermon – November 22, 2020
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 1:28 – 29

Colossians 3:16

Let's open our Bibles together. We're going to spend our time in Colossians 1, verses 28 and 29 this morning. As you turn there, if you enjoyed seeing our Kids Praise up here, will you just let them know about that this morning? Bible tells us that God rejoices in childlike faith that it's encouraging to see that on display here. If this is your first time with us, maybe you just came to watch those kids or grandkids perform or whether you're catching us online. If this is your first time here, welcome home. We want you to know this is a church that is centered on Christ's word. And we come to it each week trusting that God will speak to us by His Spirit through this time together in His word. See, remember last week when we were looking through verses 26 and 27, we watched the way that Paul laid out the mystery of the word of God. Now this morning, as we turn our attention to verses 28 and 29, we're going to see how he walks us through the ministry of the word of God. And so follow along with me as we end chapter one of Colossians.

[²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.](#)

Well what do you do if you come up with a world-saving vaccine, but have no way to distribute it? To get it to the people that are need? That's the question that's been wracking the minds of logistical experts around the world for the last several months. While pharmaceutical companies have been working on a cure, working on a vaccine that can deliver us from the risk of death from COVID, there have been others that have been working side-by-side with them about, once a vaccine is made, how will we get it to the people that need it? That's become more relevant just this week as the first vaccine trial is applied for emergency authorization from the FDA. It's from Pfizer and some of the challenges that will come in the process of this distribution are things that you and I might have never thought of. One of the realities is that for a number of these vaccines that are candidates for a cure, their, the vaccines must be kept at deep temperatures. Extremely cold temperatures. Up to negative 90 in order to protect them during the transportation process. And the reason for that is because if they become too warm, it can

diminish the ingredients on the inside and render them ineffective. So you can't just ice these down with regular ice. What you need is dry ice to do that. Well the problem right now is there's a shortage of dry ice in the world. Yet another gift from 2020, right? And so they're trying to come up with ways to produce more of that. And they're developing these special coolers to ship them in, to keep them cold. That not only are well insulated and can be cooled by the dry ice, but they've got GPS trackers so they can keep track of where they're located. They've got thermometers that can sense what the temperature is to make sure that it's able to stay there the entire time from when it's delivered until when it's used. And the reason for that is because they know that life and death is at stake. When you have something that can save lives, there is an intentionality that you will commit to transporting that thing so that it might accomplish its work.

And if that's true for something that can provide physical healing like a COVID vaccine, how much more so is that true for the spiritual healing that can be found in the gospel? What we're going to find this morning is as we come to the end of Colossians 1, Paul is going to speak about the nature of our ministry of the word. And through that he's going to call us to a gospel intentionality. That we know life and death spiritually is at stake with what people do with Jesus. And so for us, if we're going to follow Christ, if we're going to follow the example of Paul, what that's going to mean is that we live lives of gospel intentionality. Now when you look at this text, you may be prone or tempted to just check out. You say, "Well this doesn't have anything to offer me." Here's Paul, one of the super Christians in the New Testament, somebody whose devoted his life to full-time ministry. And he's speaking about the nature of that full-time ministry. There's nothing there for me. But the reality is that what Paul is experiencing, what he's articulating about his life, God has called us all into. In the ministry of the word of God. And what we're going to find this morning, is that the ministry of the word of God requires both intentionality and intensity.

So let's begin by looking back in verse 28. We're going to see first that Paul calls us to a gospel intentionality. He starts off the verse by saying, Him we proclaim. So Paul is going to lead with showing us that we have an intentional message. That we have something to proclaim. That word proclaim is one of the most common in the New Testament for the act of preaching. It's an announcing, a declaring of a message. And Paul only uses it about preaching in the New Testament. And who are the ones that are called to proclaim? Well look what he says there right at the beginning of the verse. Him we proclaim. Paul's not just talking about his own ministry. He has in mind likely, Timothy. He probably has in mind Epaphras who took the gospel to the Colossians. But ultimately he has us all in mind. That when we proclaim that gospel message, that's what we are doing in carrying forward the intentional message that God has laid out for us. And what is that message? Do you see what he says there? Him we proclaim. He is speaking about how Jesus is at the center of our message. That when we declare the truths of God, they find their centerpiece in Jesus. And He's at the center of our message. And it's not just to those who are lost that need to be saved. He's the center of our message to those who are saved that need to be sanctified. The gospel is the means by which God is using to conform us to the image of Christ. There has to be an intentionality in our ministry of the word because we recognize that He is the only hope of salvation.

If you were to go around to churches around our country, you might hear different things in different places. Some of them are going to preach a prosperity gospel where God will reward

you when you give to Him. That you, in a sense, earn it through your financial commitment to God. You may go to other churches that are going to speak to your felt needs and give you life principles and tips for what it looks like to live in a moral or even Christian way. But what Paul is showing us here this morning is that our message is different. It's not just about Christian principles or family values. It is about a crucified and resurrected King. That Jesus is the center of our message. He is the founder of the universe. He is the centerpiece of the Scripture. He is at work in our hearts in a way that we should embrace the reality that all things are through Him and for Him. You know, when we were up here this morning during the worship and you had the kids lined up right on these steps behind us, if one of those was connected to your family, my guess is your worship experience was a little bit different today. Where you were experiencing the worship through the lens of your encounter and seeing that child, that grandchild, that friend that you are here representing. You were still engaged with God. You were still taking in the environment around you. But you were seeing things with the focus on a particular person that gave you a different viewpoint than you otherwise would have had. And when Paul speaks here that, Him we proclaim, that is the picture. That we see life through the Jesus lens. That He is our central message. And we are called to declare that message intentionally.

And he's going to show us what that looks like as we go on through verse 28 when he says next that we don't just have an intentional message, but an intentional method. He tells us, if you look back at the verse, warning everyone and teaching everyone. So the way that we proclaim is by doing two things. By warning and by teaching. This term warning is an admonition, a rebuke, an exhortation, an instruction. Literally it means to put your mind in place. Often it was used in situations where somebody's conduct wasn't matching what it should be and you're calling them back. You're warning them of the dangers of that and calling them to return to what they should be doing. And that's paired hand-in-hand, not just with warning, but with instruction. This idea of educating, of teaching, that is going on there. There is both a correction of wrong and an introduction of what is right. You know, during this COVID season, one of my heroes right now are our teachers that are educating the next generation. Whether that's a homeschooling mom, or a public school principle, or a private school teacher, or a professor at A&M. I cannot even imagine the difficulties of what it looks like to function in the classroom during a season like this. But despite all the external circumstances that make things more difficult, the root concept of what a teacher does is still unchanged even during this time period. They are to teach and they are to warn. They are to educate. They are to correct. And they use those two things together in order to move students away from a wrong understanding and move them into a right understanding. And in a similar way, Paul is calling us to an intentional method in our gospel proclamation. That we warn, that we teach, that we train so that we can put people on the pathway to experiencing God and the gospel. And when that happens, notice the way that he keeps going. Paul says, if we want to be faithful in our gospel ministry it also comes through an intentional mindset.

So notice what he says there in verse 28. He says, we're teaching and warning and then look at the phrase he uses after that. With all wisdom. It's not enough to have the right message and the right method if we don't have the right mindset. Paul speaks there of wisdom. We're going to find when we start up Colossians 2 that in verse 3 he's going to tell us that in Christ are hidden all the riches of wisdom and knowledge. That our understanding of what wisdom is can only be understood in its relationship to Jesus. He is true wisdom. So when Paul says here that we teach and we warn with all wisdom, it's saying that we teach and we warn through the lens of Jesus.

That we're helping people to understand that His ways are above our ways. This phrase, with all wisdom, only shows up in Paul's writing on four occasions. And three of those four are right here in the book of Colossians. The one we're looking at today. We've already seen one example back in verse 9 when he's praying for the Colossians and for us. And then the third one, I want you to look at right now. If you'll turn over with me to Colossians chapter 3 in verse 16. I want you to notice what Paul shows us here this morning. Because he uses the same phrase, but this time it's not just limited to his preaching as a minister, but these are words to everyone in the church. Colossians 3:16.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

So what we're seeing here in this other usage of this phrase, with all wisdom, is that Paul doesn't just have himself in mind. He's got the entire church in view. That all of us are to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. In other words, there's this iron sharpening iron reality that should be taking place in the church. That should be our intentional mindset. That we want to walk in wisdom and we want to equip others to do the same as well. And when that happens, when we embrace that type of intentional mindset, look back at verse 28 at the way that it brings about an intentional mission. He says, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. What Paul is reminding us of is that our message has a mission. Our proclamation has a purpose. And what is it? It's in order that we might present everyone complete in Christ. That we've seen this word present already show up back in verse 22. It's coming out of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and it means to give or to offer. This idea that Paul has here is that there is coming a day when each of us will stand before God to give an account for how we've lived our lives. And that the longing of our hearts is that we might be intentional in our mission so that through our ministry God could use that as part of what it looks like to help each of us be presented fully complete and mature before God in that last day. So right now we're coming up on the end of the semester and I'm sure there are Aggies all around our community that are scrambling to prepare for finals. But they're also likely working on the end of projects they've got to present to their professor or to the class. Maybe it's an individual project. Maybe it's a group project. They've worked on it all year. They've poured themselves into it over the course of the semester. Or, if we're being honest, they're just scrambling right now to do the stuff they should have been doing all along. But at whatever situation they find themselves in, ultimately they are going to stand before one that brings judgement upon them as they present that project at the end of the course and find out where they stand as a result of it. Well how much more so is that reality true for us in Christ? What the gospel shows us is that if we trust in Jesus, we don't have to wonder or fear where we will stand before God and the future. That's already been answered on the cross. That when Jesus was raised from the dead and we put our faith in Him or salvation, now we know that there is coming a day when we will be presented before God in maturity, in completeness. And what Paul is showing us is we have an intentional mission so that we can help people in Christ become who they already are. Those who are mature. This term carries the idea of a fullness, a completion. It's like fruit that is fully ripened. It's come to the end of its intended usage. And what Paul is showing us there as he speaks of this is that we are to grow in maturity in Christ. And who's supposed to grow? He says there, if you look back at it; everyone. Or maybe your translation says, all men. This phrase is used three consecutive times in verse 28. And what Paul is showing us is that when the gospel is at work, it is capable

of reaching anybody. He's just contrasted the way that God has opened up the gospel, not just to Jews, but to Gentiles as well. But remember he is countering false teachers that have come into the Colossian church and they were seeking to lead people astray from Christ. And often the way that they would do that is by proclaiming that they had secret knowledge. That they had a deeper understanding that was withheld only for those who followed them. That it wasn't available to the common man or to everyone. It was limited in its reach. But Paul upends that reality. He says that this gospel truth, that if we are in Christ, we are being made complete, is available for all men. For all of us who put our faith in Jesus. One day we will experience the maturity that we are already called to in Christ.

So how do you know if you're moving towards that maturity? How do you know if you're seeing the Lord complete His work in you? Well that shows up by the reality that when we see things the way that God sees them. And when we serve others the way that God would have us serve them. So I was up here at the church on Monday night and I happened to have the opportunity to pop in to see our Special Needs ministry doing their Monday night Mix. What I saw were volunteers who exhibited this maturity of Christ. They're pouring themselves out for people on the margins of our community. People that can't naturally give back to them. They're not doing it because they're supposed to or because they ought to or even because they have. But because they want to. There's a commitment, a longing, an intentionality in what they're doing for the sake of this gospel mission. So the danger that you and I face is that we can be intentional people but in the wrong places. So for you men this morning, how many of you as you come into Thanksgiving week have been more intentional about planning what it looks like to harvest that deer or to smoke that meat than to create an environment of gratitude and thanksgiving in your home for this holiday? And how many of you women as you start to look beyond Thanksgiving to Christmas have been more intentional about what it looks like to cultivate an atmosphere in your family's home through decorations than to cultivate an atmosphere in your family's hearts through discipleship? The danger is that we could miss God's design for our life if we're intentional, but in the wrong way. See, Paul is calling us to a gospel intentionality.

But notice the way that this text goes on. Because we're going to see right after this in verse 29 that Paul also calls us to a gospel intensity. So look back at how he says it. Verse 29.

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

See, Paul doesn't just call us to that gospel intentionality, but also to a gospel intensity. Because he knows this reality is true. That intentionality without intensity can result in an unhelpful apathy. But intensity without intentionality can result in an unfruitful activity. We have to have both together on the sake of the mission that God has called us to. Paul is modelling for us an intensity with which we seek to serve the gospel. That we seek to follow after Christ. And that shouldn't be anything new to us. We live in a culture that's often high in intensity. That intensity might show up in people's preferences for presidential politics. Or maybe in their passions for their favorite college football team. Or maybe they're opinions about whether or not we should have to wear a mask. Or whether or not you should get a vaccine. Or, as I've learned over the last couple weeks, there's a lot of intensity in our church and people's opinions about candy corn after I mentioned it a couple of weeks ago in the sermon. Some of you love it. And I'm happy for you. But what happens as a result of these tensions, these passions, is that they

can polarize us. They can separate us. We live in a time period that understands what it means to be intense for something we care deeply about. The question before us is, is that true of us when it comes to Jesus? Would someone look at your life and say, "They are sold out for Christ. They are all in." That's what Paul is calling us to this morning. He talks about how our intensity is grounded in Christ's eternal purpose. That's the way he begins there when he says, for this I toil. That phrase, for this, he is pointing back to what he has just spoken of. The mission of Christ that is carried out in the gospel. The call of the ministry of the mystery of the word of God that we are entitled and responsible to convey. Those things are what drives him. He sees the purpose that God has laid out for his life and it transforms him. That intensity is shaped by God's intention for his life. And as a result that shows up by him using the phrase, toil. It's this idea of hard work, diligent work, the kind of work that you work so hard you work until you're weary. That you exert yourself to the point of exhaustion. There is this intensity to the gospel work that we are called to. And that shouldn't surprise us. The reason why gospel ministry is hard is because it's often thankless. It can be complex. It feels like it's never ending. And the reality is that underneath it all that's true because we are constantly facing a spiritual headwind from our enemy. Satan hates the way that you serve. He wants to get you off course and to distract you. But the call that Paul is making to us this morning is not just to fill seats, but to fulfil a purpose. To recognize Christ's eternal purpose for our lives.

Before we moved to College Station, our family had the chance to go on a number of SEC road trips. We travelled from Nashville to see A&M play different sporting events. And I remember when we were driving back from one of those going through northern Alabama, we saw a church on the side of the road. Now that's not all that unique. I mean, there's churches all over the place in Alabama just like there is here. But what grabbed my attention was the sign out front. This church was called Burnout Baptist Church. Burnout. I've never heard of a church called Burnout. How could that be? Well, I looked it up and it turns out it's in a community known as Burnout. A community called Burnout. That's why it's called Burnout Baptist Church. Now you may have never seen burnout, a church in a community called Burnout. But we've all seen burnout in the community of the church. We know what it's like to be running on empty. We know what it's like when our discouragement overtakes our determination. We know what it's like when we're just going through the motions. And what Paul was reminding us of here is that if we want to press on with the intensity of the ministry that God has called us to, it depends on clinging to Christ's eternal purpose. That the way we resist that pull towards burnout is to recognize why we're in this in the first place. And to remind ourselves of the ministry that Christ has called us to. And we are able to keep serving faithfully when we remain captivated by the mission that Christ has called us to as a church. It depends on remembering Christ's eternal purpose. But notice also that Paul shows us our intensity is grounded in Christ's eternal power. That's what he says there in the middle of the verse when he says, struggling with all his energy. Paul is showing us that Christ is not just working for us, but that He is working through us. And he uses that phrase struggling. This is a term in that time period that would have conjured up imagery from athletic competition. It's a type of word that you would use when a defensive end is trying to get to the quarterback and fighting through the offensive line. It's the type of word that you would describe a boxer who is squaring off an opponent wanting to be the last one standing. It's to fight. It's to contest for the prize. To press on to win. In fact, the original word in the original language is the word from which we get our English word agonize. That sense of agony, that commitment, that pressing forward for the sake of accomplishing the goal. That's what Paul is speaking of here. That the Christian life, Christian ministry should be one of total

exertion. But how should we struggle? Paul doesn't tell us the way to do that is to discipline ourselves. To show our own strength. To prove our capabilities in the arena. How do we do it? He tells us there, with all his energy. That Christ is at work in us. This term, energy, Paul often uses in the New Testament for the power of God. Our intensity in ministry depends on our reliance on Christ's eternal power. He is the one that supplies our need. And we know that to have been true in the life of Paul himself. Just a few verses back in verse 24, he talked about how he rejoiced in his sufferings for Christ's sake. Now the only way you can find joy in the midst of sufferings is if you have an energy to endure your experience. God had provided that for him in Christ. He had given him a way to keep pressing on. And the beauty of the gospel is that by the power of the Spirit, God does that for you and me. He gives us the energy to endure. He gives us the purpose to pursue so that we can press on with the intensity that he calls us to. But notice how Paul finishes this verse. Because what we're also going to see is that our intensity is grounded in Christ's eternal presence. It's not just about His purpose. It's not even about only His power. But we also see Christ's presence and the way that that fuels our intensity when he says that He powerfully works within me. Paul is showing us that Christ is for us. Christ is at work through us. Now he's going to show us that Christ is at work within us. That by the Spirit, God is powerfully working. That idea of powerfully work comes from the same family of words that we got our word energy from in the original language earlier in the verse. It's as if what Paul is saying here is that His energy energizes me. His power empowers me. That's the way that God is at work in His people to bring about the reality of the gospel that He longs to see through our faithful ministry. The only reason we can work for the gospel is because the gospel is already at work in us. God is unwavering in His commitment to hold all things together. And that includes the intensity with which He holds together in our lives to keep pressing on in the ministry that He's called us to regardless of the circumstances. And the way that we do that is by embodying the eternal power of Christ and the eternal presence of Christ. And how do we know that that exists in our lives? Well, it's when we respond to the world the way that Jesus responded to the world. When we are tempted, we resist it. When we are persecuted, we endure it. When we are criticized, we absorb it. And when we are brought to the end of ourselves, we turn to God in dependence. We press into His presence. We rely on Him for all that we need for life and godliness. That's the picture that Paul is laying out to us of this gospel ministry. And as we've been talking about all morning, this is a reality that is true not just for him as a ministry, but for all of us. But I can't help but wonder this morning, are there people in this room or watching online right now who are wrestling with the sense of a call to ministry? Maybe you're a college student who's coming to the end of your time at A&M looking at what's next. And rather than pursue the job you've been studying for, you keep finding yourself drawn back to the mission field. Or drawn to the idea of ministry. Whether that's for a season or for a lifetime. Whether that's for two years or two decades. Maybe the Lord's at work in your heart. Perhaps for others of you, this COVID season has upended everything. It's brought you to your knees as you've been uncertain what it looks like to make things work financially in the job that you've been working in for decades. And perhaps what God is doing is prompting you by the spirit to reevaluate your priorities; to reconsider your calling, to reevaluate the next chapter of your life. Perhaps He wants to use you like he did Paul for this season or for this lifetime to give yourself to ministry. To pour yourself out in the same way that Paul is showing us he is doing for the Colossians and for us. You see, what happens is that in the gospel, this intentionality and this intensity they come together. We see through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus these realities are on display. Think about the intentionality of Jesus. He leaves heaven and takes on flesh. He is intentional to carry out the ministry that

God has called Him to, to reject sin, to declare the word of God, to demonstrate the power of God. He is intentional even to go to the point of death on the cross. And how does He accomplish that victory? Not just through His intentionality, but through His intensity. He suffers every temptation that the world can throw at Him and yet He stands. He experiences all the persecution that the world could offer, yet He stands. He takes on all the sins of the entire world and yet He stands. He absorbs all the wrath of God and yet He stands. He takes everything that death can throw at Him and yet His stands. That's the intensity of the gospel for you and for me. And the question we need to wrestle with this morning is, have we tasted that victory? Have you experienced the newness of life that can only come through Jesus Christ? He has made a way for you in the gospel and He invites you into that reality.

Well, just last month an Ironman Triathlon took place on the coast of Florida. And it made international headlines. Not just because it was one of the first Ironman Triathlon races back since the pandemic. But also because of one of the participants who was engaged in the race. Now if you don't remember the intensity of a Ironman, you swim in the open water for 2.4 miles. And if that two hours of grind isn't hard enough, then you set out on your road bike for over 100-mile bike ride. And when you finally cross the finish line of that leg of the race, then you get to top it all off with a marathon, running 26.2 miles. And, oh by the way, you have to finish it all in 17 hours or less or else you don't get to finish. So this participant, this one that people gravitated to and focused to was a man named Chris Nikic. And here was Chris, he was 13 hours into the race, he was struggling his way through the marathon portion. He was 10 miles into it with 16 miles to go and he hit a wall. Chris was different than some of the other competitors that day. He was trying to become the first person in history to ever complete an Ironman Triathlon who had Down Syndrome. He had been training for over a year for this. And if you knew his story, you would understand how unthinkable this is. When he was five months old, he had open heart surgery. He didn't learn to walk until he was four. His parents had to feed him baby food until he was six. He didn't even learn how to ride a bicycle until he was fifteen. And yet here he is just six years later when he's 21. He's already swam in the open ocean. He's already biked over a hundred miles and now he's at mile marker ten and he's done. He's gassed. He's got nothing left in the tank. And in that moment of despair, in that moment when he was ready to give up, his dad came and spoke to him and he said, "Son," He asked him this question. "Are you going to let your pain win or let your dream win?" And when Chris heard those words, he was reinvigorated. He remembered by he got into it in the first place. That intentionality to put one foot forward in front of the other to keep going on in the race return, that intensity, that hunger and desire he had to complete the race, came back. And as a result of that, he was able to finish the race with just 14 minutes to spare. Becoming the first man in history with Down Syndrome to ever complete an Ironman Triathlon. I don't know where you are right now in the race of the Christian life. Maybe like Chris you've hit the wall. You don't feel like you can keep going. You've lost sight of why you got into this in the first place. Or maybe you're just on the starting blocks, new to the Christian faith and ready to run. Or perhaps you're on the last leg of the race and you see that finish line approaching far faster than you would ever wish to admit. In whatever season you find yourself in, what Paul is reminding us of this morning is that the call of the gospel is to press on in the Christian life with intentionality and with intensity.

Let's pray together.

Father, Your word tells us that we are able to love one another because You first loved us. And You showed us that love with the way that You sent Your Son, the way that You rescued us from sin, and the way that You set us free. And now, Lord, the way that You've called us to minister on Your behalf for the sake of Your gospel. And I pray that we would be a people here at Central who would not experience burnout, who would not be distracted by the cares of this world, but instead would be gripped by an intentionality, a commitment, a relentless pursuit of Your mission. That nothing in the world can explain except for Your Son. And I pray, Lord, that as we move forward into this holiday season, that we will not be distracted by the cares of this world, but instead that we will keep our eyes intensely fixed on Your Son in whose name we pray. Amen.