



Sermon – January 10, 2021  
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**Verses Covered This Week**

*Colossians 2:1 – 3*

*2 Chronicles 9:22*

*1 Corinthians 11:27*

Let me invite you to grab your Bibles. We're going to be back in the book of Colossians chapter 2. Colossians 2, verses 1 through 3 this morning. And if this is your first time with us, whether you're here in the room or you're watching online, welcome home. We're so glad you're here. We're entering into a new normal as a church. We're back altogether with Life Groups today for the first time. Is anybody excited about that? Yeah! I am too. But we are entering back into a new season. But we're doing something right now that is ancient. The people of God throughout the centuries have gathered together corporately on Sundays to worship our risen King. To recognize what He's done for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ through the songs that we sing and through the Scripture that we read and through the preaching that we hear. And when we come to this text this morning, I want you to notice what's happening. As we finish Colossians 1 back before the end of the year, Paul was talking about the nature of his ministry and this morning, we're going to see him turn his attention now to the purpose of his ministry. So follow along with me in what he says beginning in 1 of chapter 2.

<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 Christ, <sup>3</sup>in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we meet You here, as we come to Your word, would You meet us in this moment and make us more like Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, I feel like this is the perfect text for a COVID season sermon. You've got Paul here in verse 1. He's talking about those that he hasn't seen face to face. And we know what that feels like during this time of separation and isolation that we're going through. There were probably

weddings or funerals that you weren't able to be at because of COVID. Or maybe for some of you, a graduation ceremony you didn't get to experience. Or you had to endure those virtual classes and the pastor, perhaps even right now. And even for church we feel that sense of separation, that disconnection, that isolation that keeps us from being face to face. I'm sure many of you have gone through that time of being separated and feeling that disconnection in this time period. And when Paul is speaking to the Colossians, he is talking about how that isolation fuels his motivation. That when there is a disconnection, it fuels our desire. That when there's a separation it enhances our longing for others. And as we turn our attention to this text, let's remember what's happening in the flow of Colossians.

Throughout this letter, Paul is writing to this church that he didn't start. He's never been with these people. One of his workers, Epaphras, helped to plant it. And now there are false teachers that have come in among them and are sowing seeds of doubt and discouragement. These Colossians are facing persecution from the outside and false teaching from the inside. And as Paul writes to them, what we're going to notice this morning is he unlocks the secret of how to overcome discouragement and doubt in our life. And here's what we're going to notice this morning. Is that Paul shows us that when we face discouragement and doubt the gospel encourages our hearts and it strengthens our assurance. So let's begin by looking back in verse 1. We'll see the way that Paul shows us first how the gospel encourages our hearts as we grow in our love for the body of Christ. No if there's a time we could use some encouragement, it's right now. We made it through 2020 and we thought, "Maybe if we can just turn the page to 2021, everything will feel different." And then the first week of 2021 showed up and looked at 2020 and said, "Hold my root beer and watch this." There's been this sense of intensity that might have many of us discouraged. But Paul's priority for us this morning is to encourage our hearts by reminding us of the struggle that he has gone through. Why? Because as verse 1 is going to show us, our hearts can be encouraged by the struggles of others on our behalf. So notice what it says there.

[For I want you to know how great a struggle I have.](#)

He's picking up on language that if you look back, he has already used in chapter 1, verse 29. This term of struggle. It's the word that we get our word today, agonize. It's this idea of competing. It's going into a contest. He's talking about how great a contest he faces for them. He is suffering for their sake and as a result of that, he is showing his commitment to them. Now what's the nature of Paul's struggle for the Colossians? Are there divisions in the church politically? Are there arguments about the direction of where the church is going? Or how big the budget should be? Or what color the carpet should be? Or what songs they should sing on a Sunday morning? No. The nature of their discouragement is not on the basis of false dilemmas, but on the faces of, on the basis of false teachers. They have come into the church and they are leading others astray. In fact, next week we'll begin to see the way that that plays out in how they were trying to go about this. And we need to recognize and ask ourselves the question, "What is Paul struggling for?" Look back at the way he speaks about who he is struggling for there in verse 1. He says,

[I'm struggling for you, those at Laodicea, and all those that have not seen me face to face.](#)

There are three groups that he is struggling for. The Colossians who he's writing to. Those that are, it's a thriving church even in the midst of persecution. But you see who he speaks of next there? He speaks about the church at Laodicea. This was another church just 12 miles away, right down the road. And a very different story was being written. I'm sure many of you remember the way that Jesus speaks to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3. We won't turn there, but do you recall what He says? He says, "You are neither hot nor cold. You are, what, lukewarm." There is this apathy in their midst. This reluctance. This reluctance. This disengagement that is happening there in the church at Laodicea that is so different from what we see in the vibrant community of faith in Colossians. Yet, Paul struggles for both of them regardless of how they respond to his ministry efforts.

There's sometimes when we pour ourselves out for the sake of the gospel and of the church. What we wonder is, is it worth it? We don't see the kind of response that we hope for. We don't see the types of reactions that we would desire. We wonder, "Does our effort matter?" And what Paul's struggles remind us of is this reality: that the reactions of people to our ministry struggles should not affect our commitment to those, to pouring ourselves out for the sake of the gospel. Some of the people that you are ministering on behalf of will flourish like the Colossians. Others will flounder like the Laodiceans. What Paul is reminding us of here is that the responsibility for us is to struggle and the responsibility of God is to strengthen. He uses our work to strengthen His people. And what we find here is a principle of next generation impact. You see, Paul had never seen these Colossians before. What he had done is he had reached a man named Epaphras. He had raised him up by the power of the Spirit and sent him out on a mission and he had planted that church in Colossae and now because Paul had made an impact on him, he made an impact through him. That's the idea when he's talking about writing to those he hasn't seen face to face. Is that our gospel efforts don't just affect who we see, they affect beyond who we see. That our work isn't just something that shapes in them, but shapes through them. That's one of the reasons I love this church. It was 20 years ago this spring semester of the year when I was a freshman at A&M and I settled on Central as my home church. We were meeting on Coulter Avenue and I showed up and as a college freshman, I didn't have a lot to offer other than an overconfidence in the future of the Aggie football program under Dennis Francione and an overconfidence in how I knew all the nuances and finer points of theology. I was one of those overzealous college Christian kids. That if you've been here long enough, you've seen them. But you know what this church did for me? You sowed seeds of the gospel in my life. You invested in me. You poured yourself out. Not knowing if you would ever see a return. Not knowing if I would be back here 20 years from now or where the Lord would take me. And yet you, as a church, were faithful to invest in me. And the desire of my heart as we enter into this next year is that same longing and commitment to next generation impact will continue to guide our church. That as college students start coming back over the next couple weeks, we will continue to pour ourselves out for them. Or when we invest in our younger generation through Awana or through Central Sports or Zeal. No matter what it is, we are sowing seeds that we may never see harvested. We may never see all the fruit that comes. But just like Paul, we will keep struggling even for those that we may not get to see face to face.

Now why should we struggle for the sake of others? What we're going to find as we move through verse 1 all the way to verse 3 is that Paul gives us two reasons why we are called to struggle for the sake of others. And if you look back in the beginning of verse 2, you're going to notice the first one. That we are called to struggle because it enables us to encourage one

another's hearts as we grow in love for the body of Christ. That's the way he says it there. That their hearts may be encouraged. This word encourage means to comfort or to strengthen. It's not a superficial encouragement like what we might have heard on the basketball courts yesterday in our first week of Central Sports. Where after you soundly beat the other team, you pat your buddy on the back and say, "Good game." It's not some superficial encouragement like that. It is deep seated in its nature. It cuts even to the heart. Paul is speaking there about the way that our struggles strengthen the hearts of others. Your struggles can be the source of encouragement for someone else. You may be wondering, "Why is it that God is allowing this season of difficulty in my life?" But perhaps it's not just for your sake, but for the sake of someone around you. That as they watch you keep pressing on in the midst of those trials, when they watch you suffer or struggle, it is an encouragement to them knowing that they are not alone.

But Paul goes on to show us that our encouragement comes not just through the urgency of our actions, but through the unity of our affections. So notice the way that the text goes on there. He tells us about how we are being knit together in love. That there should be a love for one another in the church. A love that shows up as being knit together. And it's using this imagery in the original language that we would describe today like when someone is fashioning clothes. They take those threads and they weave them together. Or for you children in the room, it's an analogy like what you do with Legos. When you take those different sizes and shapes and colors and you take them and you connect them together and they lock into place to form something greater than themselves. To be united in purpose. There's this sense of unity, this sense of connection, and what Paul is showing us is that unity breeds encouragement. And if there's ever a time we could use some encouragement in our country, doesn't it feel like today? I mean I know every one of you watched in horror, troubled, this week by what happened in our nation's capital. And I'm standing before you as a pastor and I wish I had all the words to tell you about how we need to fix it. But if I'm being honest with you, I'm just unsettled. That we could have a situation in our country where there is such deep division, where you can have a situation in our country where for the first time in over 200 years you had people storm into our capital. Where you could have a situation where the social media has unraveled and people have been banned and all sorts of things have fueled sense them. Where you can have a situation where on the lawn of the capital, there's a cross in one place and a gallows in the other. Where you can have a situation where the confederate flag is being paraded through our nation's capital. We saw darkness this week. We saw division. And what Paul is reminding us of in this moment is that regardless of our politics, regardless of what you think about the outcome of the election or the events that transpired this week, we may not agree about that. But what we can all agree on is that we are living in a broken world. That we are living in a time of division. And this is something that we as a church need to recognize, that we should not see as a challenge, but as an opportunity. Because when the darkness gets deeper, it creates an opportunity for the light to shine brighter. And what Paul is reminding us of here, when he speaks about how we are being knit together in love, he is showing us that the only hope of our nation, the only hope of our church, the only hope of our encouragement is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That our union with Christ can be the foundation for our unity with one another. That's why he speaks there of our hearts being knit together in love. And as your pastor, one of my ongoing prayers for our church is that God would work amongst us to knit our hearts together in love. That's one of the reasons I was so excited for us to be back together in one service starting this new year. Because there's something that you lose in two services. That sense of separation where you don't get to see

somebody or you don't get to make that connection. When we worship together, it helps to knit us together in love. And that's so urgent right now in this moment of isolation. I imagine there are some of you in the room, perhaps others of you watching online who as the months have gone on, and as you start to think about your connection here at Central, you just don't feel connected anymore. You're wondering if this is still the right spot for you. If this is where God has you. That separation from community has led into a discouragement that's even caused doubt. What Paul is showing us here when he speaks about our hearts being knit together in love is that the solution to that is not checking out, but locking in. It's by putting aside the things that would distract us from our connection and recommitting to the community of the local church. Because what Paul is showing us is that when we combine the urgency of our actions with the unity of our affections, it results in the encouragement of our hearts.

But I want you to notice. He speaks here not just of the way that his struggles encourage our hearts, but notice the second thing he does in verses 2 and 3. Paul also shows us how the gospel strengthens our assurance as we grow in the knowledge of the mystery of Christ. So look right there in the middle of verse 2. He says,

[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.](#)

What Paul is showing us in this section is that God doesn't just meet us in our discouragements. He also meets us in our doubts. You know, doubt comes up in our life when we feel like we are facing an uncertainty or a mystery that we can't solve and that certainty often fuels a complacency, an apathy, a disconnection. We can feel as if we are the only one who's going through this. That everybody else around us in this room or watching online has it figured out and we don't. These doubts can often show up in one of two ways. Doubts can creep into our life when we question the greatness of God. We wonder at its root, is He powerful enough to do what He says He can do? Is He powerful enough to meet me in my need? We see this show up all throughout the Scripture. But perhaps a good example is, you remember when Jesus is on the boat with His disciples and they're travelling across the water and a major storm fuels up. And all of the disciples are dismayed. But they look over at Jesus and He's sleeping in the boat. And when they awaken Him, they cry out for Him to help them, and how does He respond? He tells them, "Oh, you of little faith." They doubted the greatness of God. They doubted if His power was enough to meet them in his moment.

That's one of the ways that we can wrestle with doubt. But the other way we can wrestle with doubt is not just when we question the greatness of God. But also when we question the goodness of God. The question is not, is He powerful enough to meet me in this moment? The question becomes, is He loving enough to meet me in this moment? Does He care enough about me, my crisis, my situation, to find me in this moment and meet me? And that's a challenge that's been going on in humanity all the way back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve were tempted to partake of that forbidden fruit. At the core of it, they were questioning the goodness of God. Does He really know what's best with them? And when we come to this text today in Colossians 2, what we find is that the second reason that Paul struggles for us is to strengthen our assurance in the midst of our doubts. Notice how he says it there.

[To reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding.](#)

Now why would the Colossians need this kind of assurance in the midst of their doubts? As we've been talking about, they've had these false teachers who were giving a different direction, a different way to pursue God. Perhaps claiming that they are the only ones that can unlock the mysteries of the world and Paul tells them that in the midst of this deceptive teaching, they can experience a full assurance. Now that phrase you see in your Bible, full assurance, only appears four times in the entire Scripture. This is the only time it shows up in this way in the New Testament. And what it is signaling to us is a complete confidence in God's faithfulness. In His dependability. In His reliability. That God is who He says He is and He will do what He says He's going to do. As you made your way into church this morning, you started to see the early indicators of a winter storm that's heading our way. It was like this mix of rain and sleet and a few snowflakes. And the forecasters tell us it's coming. You know, I'll believe it when I see it, right? It almost seems too good to be true, but it seems likely. But the way these forecasters work is they look at models of the upcoming weather and they make predictions on the basis of probability that try to assure others of what to expect in the future. Now how often are they right? Not as much as we would prefer. The challenge for some of us is that we think of our faith like a forecast. That we look into the future and we're banking on probabilities and possibilities based on current directions and our future aspirations. We hope that God will meet us in the future. We hope that we will come to an eternal life with Him in, for the rest of the existence of this world. We desire for these things to be true, but we are just not sure. That's not a full assurance. It's a partial assurance. It can comfort you in a moment. But think about it like this. The forecasters today are saying there's a nearly 100% certainty of snow. If you were to make a forecast for your faith, and just ask yourself the question. If you had to put a percentage on how likely it would be that if you died tonight that you would stand before God in heaven receiving eternal life. Where would you put that percentage? How confident are you? Would it be 100%? Would it be less than that? What Paul is doing here is he's speaking to this reality that so often we struggle with doubts, we don't know what is to come. And yet he is meeting us in this moment by speaking about how we can reach the riches of full assurance. See, the riches of full assurance are not grounded in a faith like a forecast, but perhaps more like a faith like a fire.

So last night I was with some of our men out at our campfire having a time of fellowship and connection. And as I watched that fire, I was reminded of this reality. That what the Bible teaches us is that when salvation comes into someone's life, what does God do? He takes the fuel of the gospel and when it's met by the spark of faith and it's fanned into flame by the wind of the Spirit, it builds into a fire that cannot be put out. It is a fire in your heart of full assurance. As the Scripture says elsewhere, a consuming fire. It's one that can never be shaken because the fuel will never be exhausted. That's the kind of full assurance that Paul speaks of here. And now look, the flame of faith goes through various seasons. And I'm sure that some of you are coming into 2021 and you feel as if in your spiritual life it is a raging fire of desire. It couldn't be going better. And yet for some of you that know Jesus, you feel more like it's a smoldering wick. That you're down to the coals or the ashes. When Paul speaks here of this full assurance, he's speaking about how that overcomes our doubts. It overcomes those difficult seasons. And that no matter where you find yourself as we enter into this new year, he is showing us that we can trust God because He has revealed to us what Paul says here in verses 2 and 3 is the mystery of Christ. So look back at what he's saying there. The nature of our assurance is built on what? The end of verse 2 tells us. On our understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is

Christ. You know, these false teachers were speaking about the mysteries of God that only they could know and in that moment for the second time now in just a few verses, Paul speaks about the nature of this mystery. If we're to go back and look at Colossians 1:26 and 27, we would see the way that he speaks about this mystery in terms of the universal mission of God to reach all people. Not just Jews, but the entire world including the Gentiles. But now when he focuses on the nature of this mystery, he's not talking about the universal mission of Christ. He's talking about the unique reality of Jesus Himself. That the way we can have assurance is because God has revealed to us the mystery of the gospel which is Jesus. He has made known to us those things that are true of Him. This is one of the highpoints of the way that Paul speaks about Jesus in this letter. He speaks about the mystery of Christ. Look at verse 3.

[In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.](#)

One of the things my boys and I do when it's Christmas season is we'll, when we're thinking about gifts for Cami is we'll walk through every room in our house and we'll just size up the room and ask ourselves, "Is there anything missing here that she might need that we can get as a gift?" And we were going room to room to room. We were almost done. We walked out into the garage. And as we were looking out there and sizing things up, she came and opened up the door and said, "Whatever y'all do, don't open those cabinets." Well, all my boys, that got their attention. Why would we not need to open the cabinets? And I think they figured out pretty quickly that there might be something hidden in there. A gift that was to come. A treasure that they would desire that was hidden but would later be revealed. When Paul speaks here of the way that this mystery has been revealed to us, that what is hidden has been made manifest. He speaks here of this treasure of all wisdom and knowledge that has been hidden in Christ. He speaks here of the way that when we become, we come to know Jesus, we receive Him as a treasure. That what we get is not knowledge and wisdom, what we get is Jesus in whom is wisdom and knowledge. I mean, think about who is the man of greatest wisdom in the entire Old Testament? It's King Solomon, right? Notice the way that 2 Chronicles chapter 9, verse 22 speaks of him. You'll see it on the screen.

[<sup>22</sup>Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.](#)

And what the Scripture shows us is that God had raised up David, promising them that a son of David would come who would rule on his kingdom forever. Israel had put their hopes on Solomon, that this would be the one, that the promise would be fulfilled in the next generation. And here's this one who surpasses all else in riches and in wisdom. And yet we find that he blows it. He turns his back on God. He rejects the things of God. Judgment falls upon him. And yet as the Scripture unfolds, it gives us a promise of a Messiah who would come. Jesus now comes as one greater than Solomon. He is Solomon's son, not who possesses riches and wisdom, but who himself is riches and wisdom. And now it is ours if we find ourselves in Jesus. You see, in the ancient culture there was nothing that was prized greater than wisdom and knowledge. And yet Paul is showing us of the reality that if we want to have assurance in the midst of our doubts, it is only grounded in the fact that God has revealed His mystery to us. He has made known the Messiah. That if we trust in Jesus for our salvation, turning away from our sins and looking for His deliverance, what does God do? He unites our hearts to Jesus. That treasure that is hidden is now revealed to us. We receive Christ and with Him we get all those treasures of wisdom and knowledge.



Now if I gave you a million dollars this morning, do you think you could spend all one million in under an hour? I hear some kids saying, yes, as I asked that. I noticed this week that Elon Musk, that eccentric entrepreneur surpassed Jess Bezos as the world's richest man. His wealth has grown by five times in just the last year alone. And he now tops out a \$185 billion dollars of net worth. If you want to know how much money that is, if you were to spend \$1 million dollars an hour every hour, it would take you 21 years to spend all of his riches, to take yourself through all of his treasure, to use up all of his wealth. When Paul speaks here of Jesus as the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, he is saying that is nothing but a drop in the bucket compared to the riches that we have in Jesus. And that the way that we fight discouragement, the way that we resist doubt is by clinging to the gospel reality that Jesus is enough for us. That God meets us through His Son in a way that encourages our hearts and strengthens our assurance.

It's so fitting that we come to this as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's table. Because in this text this morning, we find the foundation for our faith. We see the way that God encourages our hearts. He strengthens our assurances, not just through the gospel, but through the rhythms of the gospel community. Including baptism that we celebrated this morning as well as the Lord's Supper. So when we wrap up our time in just a moment after I pray, we're going to begin our process of the Lord's Supper. And I want to invite you during that time, if you know Jesus, if you've been baptized, you're walking with Him to partake of this family meal. That we're not just hearing the gospel proclaimed, we are tasting and seeing that the Lord is good. And as we stand and sing in just a moment, I want to invite you to these tables. You can grab the elements, bring them back to your seats. You can pick some up for your family. If you start running out in the back, you can make your way to the middle or here in the front where there will be plenty remaining. And as we do this, let's not forget what Jesus reminds us of. I want you to hear these words that he breathes out through the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 about the need we have to examine our hearts as we enter into this moment. 1 Corinthians 11:27 says this:

*[27Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.](#)*

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to the table, I pray that You would remind us of the way that Jesus went to the cross. That He poured out His body. He shed His blood. He gave Himself as a sacrifice for us. Even when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And I pray in this time of response that You would remind us of that reality. Father, I'm asking you now, if there are people in this room who when they look at the forecast of their faith, they're not confident with a 100% full assurance that they will stand before You and be received, that You would convict them of their sins now and show them their need of the gospel and rescue them in salvation. And as you move among us, Lord, I pray that Your Spirit has its way. And we ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen.