

NOTES FROM STEVEN DRIVER'S SERMON 21st May am Series in Colossians "Rooted and built up in Christ" Pt 3 "Our joyful calling"

Text: Colossians 1 verses 24-29

Scripture references from the ESV

Colossians 1:24-29 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, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

When we read about extraordinary men and women doing amazing things for the name of Jesus, it is easy to look at ourselves and think I could never do that! We might think we are not smart enough, we're too young or too old, or we're just not that sort of person. We come up with lots of reasons why God couldn't use us in similar ways, and whatever we were reading that was supposed to encourage us ends up making us despondent.

It feels as if those people we have read about have something that makes them special. It is something that we think we do not have. What we have instead is fear:

- Fear of failure – insecurity about trying something new and failing
- Fear of the way people look at us – we don't want to appear too eager in case people think we're weird
- Fear of suffering – particularly if we have read about missionaries who are going to places where Christians are persecuted.

Fear dominates not just what we do but how we think about ourselves, and it leads us to the conclusion that God cannot use us.

Fear is having the final word over how we live our lives.

There is a better way – indeed a joyous way, and in Paul's life, we can see how Jesus transformed a life that had been defined by fear into a life and ministry characterised by

joy. This small Colossian church had been made to feel that it was getting it wrong and that the members were not good enough. Paul wanted to show them how the gospel and other teaching had worked out in his life.

In Acts 7 and all the way through to chapter 9, Paul (then called Saul) had been a man whose sole aim was to find and destroy Christians, preferably as many as possible. He was a man to be feared, and he understood fear, because fear was his ally. All that changed when he had a supernatural encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

A life defined by fear was transformed into a life defined by joy.

Paul explained to the Colossians why he could rejoice in his new life and he gives us three reasons to rejoice in the life and calling God has made for us, no matter what the result.

- 1. We can rejoice with Paul because the great mystery has been revealed (vv25-27 above).** In his unique apostle role, Paul was charged to make the Word of God fully known. He understood that he was being used by God to reveal the great mystery that had been hidden since the beginning of creation. It was the mystery of how God would save his people and restore them to a full relationship with him.

What is that mystery? Paul had already talked about how the one who holds all creation together had died for us on the cross, taking the punishment we deserve so that we are no longer alienated from God but are holy and blameless in his sight. That is true no matter what our background is or our skills are. All that is already cause to rejoice and we should, indeed, rejoice because of it.

Paul goes one step further, however.

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 (v27)

The mystery of mysteries now revealed is not just something that happened 2000 years ago. It is the reality that what Christ has done means that, right now, Christ is in us. All that we read of Jesus – the glory of God, his magnificence, power and holiness – is directly and personally present in our lives.

Christ is in us and we are in him

We are in an eternal joyous union with Christ.

Paul singled out the Gentiles (us) with the Colossians because, before Jesus, it would have been impossible for anyone but the Jews to have intimacy with God. This intimacy that we can have is undeserved and unmerited. As the fulness of God the Father dwells in the Son, and the Son dwells in us, through the Spirit, we get caught up into the never-ending dance of the Godhead. In this life, we only get a foretaste of this truth. When Jesus returns, this dance will rise to a crescendo and we will bask in the glorious riches of God's fulness being made known to us.

- Take time to dwell on this truth in the coming weeks.
- Remember that you are not alone and that you are not your own. You were bought with a price.
- God is not some distant figure watching over you from afar. Instead, he is intertwined with us.

Christ has won us and we are in him and he is in us.

He is directing and guiding us, and pointing us to himself. He longs for us to recognise this, and to enjoy the truth of it.

2. **We can rejoice with Paul because we all get to grow in Christ. (v28)** Paul revealed the mystery in his role as an apostle. Then he went on to proclaim it along with others. He did so in order to present everyone mature in Christ.

His goal is not for people just to know Christ.

He wants everyone to reach their earthly potential in Christ.

Dwelling more and more on the truth of Christ in us will lead to a life that is more and more mature. We will be growing in Christ, and becoming more and more the person we were designed to be. We will grow more into the likeness of Christ, listening to him and submitting to his control in all aspects of our life. This is not just for the 'special' people referred to at the start. Paul's expectation is that this will be for everyone, including you!

You can grow in Christ and become more Christlike.

That is what Christ is longing for us all to do.

He calls us to push ourselves, and work hard at a life of worship of Christ, letting the proclaimed word take hold so that it warns us when we wander away from Christ. We do not need to be defensive when the word corrects us. It helps us to grow. The revealed mystery humbles us, showing us our desperate need for Christ.

We all know we are not perfect, but it been can be hard to admit to our shortcomings. When we have Christ revealed to us, he gently and lovingly brings us to a point where we don't just admit to our faults, but also allow ourselves to be corrected and to grow closer to him. That is what intimacy with Christ brings about in us.

We grow in our knowledge of Christ, having our mind filled with him so that we can live more like him.

We are not to stand still as Christians, but to grow in our intimacy with Christ.

What a joyous life that is!

Even when that life results in suffering, as it did for Paul, a life filled with ever-increasing intimacy with Christ is joyous.

We so often get the wrong idea about joy. It is not the same as happy! Happiness goes almost as soon as it comes. A life based on happiness will be an endless roller-coaster of ups and downs. If we define ourselves by what makes us happy, as our culture suggests we should, our resilience will crumble when things go wrong.

Rejoicing in Christ is so much better!

Joy in Christ is found when we genuinely take hold of him and grow because we are in him, no matter what else is happening around us. It is not static – it grows even in, and often because of, suffering. Paul knew that his suffering, whatever the outcome was not only God's plan but was also a means by which he would grow closer to God. He recognised that he felt closer to Christ when he suffered, even though his suffering was terrible. He was certainly not happy when it happened, but he was full of joy!

You are thinking 'I could never do that!' The truth is neither could Paul. In his own strength, Paul could not cling to his joy in Christ, nor could he have the strength to reveal and then proclaim the great mystery. Those 'special' people could never do what they do because of their own abilities, and you could not live this life either.

This life that Paul is living is impossible! However...

3. We can rejoice with Paul because Christ empowers us to live out this life (v29).

This does **not** mean that the Christian life is not hard work. It is and will be, but the power to do it comes from Christ alone. Imagine that you are in a boxing match, where you keep being knocked down, but you get up every time and carry on. That is the sort of life that Paul is describing.

The energy for such a life is not Paul's energy. It comes from being in Christ, and Paul knew that Christ was working in him, empowering him. This is true for all who call on the name of Jesus.

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me (v29) Hudson Taylor, who founded China Inland Mission (now OMF), was once described as the hardest working Christian you might ever see. He pushed himself to the limit in order to ensure that as many people as possible heard about Christ. He also spent hours on his knees, knowing his total dependence on Christ, drawing from the truth that Paul speaks to the Colossians. All his energy came from Christ who was powerfully at work in him, motivating him when he felt lost, strengthening him when he was weak, and giving him words to speak when he had none of his own. Hudson Taylor was not an obvious pioneer – **he was just a man who was willing to be used by God**, as indeed was Paul.

The people whose endeavours we read about are people who are willing to be used by God, in the joyful knowledge that whatever happens, they are in Christ. Fear of the world faded and joy in Christ grew all the more.

You are probably still thinking 'I couldn't do that!' You probably won't do what Hudson Taylor did, because that was God's calling for him. You are a different person at a different life stage and from a different background. God is calling you to do a work for him from where you are right now.

God uses all of us, in extraordinarily different ways, for his glory, when we are willing to be used by him.

We can cease to listen to what fear says about us and instead listen to what Christ says about us.

We need to joyfully accept who we are in Christ and joyfully live out our new identity in him