



## **Colossians 1:25–27**

25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

# Reflection

It is an understatement to say that some of the greatest teachers and preachers in the history of the church had a high view of preaching. Charles Spurgeon, said of preaching,

If any man will preach as he should preach, his work will take more out of him than any other labour under heaven.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

For the sake of the proclaimed word the world exists with all of its words.

J I Packer,

Having studied the doctrine of Scripture for a generation the most satisfactory model is to describe it as thus: 'The Bible is God preaching'.

Martyn Lloyd Jones,

Is it not clear as you take a bird's-eye view of history, that the decadent periods and eras in the history of the Church have always been those periods when preaching had declined? What is it that always heralds the dawn of a Reformation or of a Revival? It is renewed preaching.'

Or William Sangster who says exuberantly,

Called to preach! ... commissioned of

God to teach the Word! A herald of the great King! A witness of the Eternal Gospel! Could any work be more high and holy! To this supreme task God sent his only begotten Son. In all the frustration and confusion of the times, is it possible to imagine a work comparable in importance with that of proclaiming the will of God to wayward men?

Such high views of preaching come from passages like ours today. By way of context, in Colossians 1:24–29 the apostle Paul is speaking about his ministry as Christ’s appointed servant of the church. He shares with the Colossians his attitude – joy in suffering; his charge – to preach the word in all its fullness; his purpose – that he might present everyone fully mature in Christ; and his energy – the ener-

gy of Christ, so powerfully at work in him. Yesterday, we marvelled at Paul's joy in suffering, a joy available to all Christians, and in today's passage Paul speaks of the charge given to him as Christ's appointed servant to the church – to preach the word in all its fullness. Reading today's passage from Col 1:25–27.

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Paul is in prison for the gospel of Jesus Christ. But his attitude is one of joy because what's put him there is fulfilling the charge that God gave him – preaching the word of God, the whole counsel of God, or as our passage says,

... the word of God in its fullness.

God's commission to the apostle Paul and every servant or 'minister' of the church since is found in verse 25.

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Someone once told me that the test of

false teaching in a church is very often not what is said from the pulpit, but what is never said from the pulpit. It is all well and good to speak about the meaning and fulfilment that is found in the Christian faith; the cultural and physical renewal of our world that was inaugurated at the resurrection of Jesus Christ; the material and relational blessings that often follow conversion and obedience to Christ in our affluent Western contexts; and the prospect of living 'our best lives now' as Christians in our world. There is truth in every one of these statements. But a church that never speaks about sin, judgment, suffering and hell is a church that is not presenting the word of God in its fullness, and a church guilty of preaching a false gospel.

William Sangster defines preaching as '30

minutes to wake the dead!’ John Wesley says of preachers, ‘Give me 100 preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God; such alone will shake the gates of hell.’ Because the greats knew that to preach a gospel that never mentions sin, hell, suffering, judgment or death is to be guilty of preaching a false gospel which is the most serious charge in all of Scripture. Colossians 1:25,

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Presenting the word of God in its fullness means preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God in context and within the relative weighting of Scripture. To re-



weight the gospel, to major on the minors and minor on the majors, risks distorting the message of Jesus Christ and leading people away from him instead of leading people to him. Elsewhere Paul speaks about this practice in the most scathing of terms, Gal 1:6–9,

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! 9 As

we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Instead, preach the word of God in its fullness, which Paul goes on to define for us in the remaining two verses of today's passage. To preach the word of God in its fullness is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, verse 26,

the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

The mystery that Paul's referring to here is the mystery of the gospel, God's progressively unfolding plan of salvation, the

story line and major theme of the Bible, that is ultimately fully and finally revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's secret plan of salvation was anticipated in the visions, symbols, and writings of the Old Testament prophets, but now, has at last been unveiled before all his people. God's secret plan is not a timetable of events, but a person. All that God has from the beginning planned to do he has done, and is doing, in Jesus, for the sake of his people which includes people from every nation on earth as verse 27 teaches us. And so essential to preaching the whole counsel of God is preach the good news of Jesus Christ's defeat of Satan, sin and death on the cross and the reconciliation he has graciously brought about between God and humankind which represents the throughline and culmina-

tion of all Scripture. Listen to how Paul describes his preaching in 1 Cor 2:2,

2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Not health, or wealth, or cultural renewal, or 'your best life now' but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Charles Spurgeon was particularly passionate about this, quoting him again,

'I know one who said I was always on the old string, and he would come and hear me no more; but if I preached a sermon without Christ in it, he would come. Ah, he will never come while this tongue moves, for a sermon without Christ in it--a Christless sermon! A

brook without water; a cloud without rain; a well which mocks the traveller; a tree twice dead, plucked up by the root; a sky without a sun; a night without a star. It were a realm of death--a place of mourning for angels and laughter for devils. O Christian, we must have Christ! Do see to it that every day when you wake you give a fresh savour of Christ upon you by contemplating his person. Live all the day, trying as much as lieth in you, to season your hearts with him, and then at night, lie down with him upon your tongue.'

## **Pray**

Pray today that you and I both would seek and savour the Lord Jesus Christ as Charles Spurgeon describes here. And

today, on the eve of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, pray that a clear gospel might continue to ring out from our pulpits for another 500 years, if the Lord Jesus continues to delay his return.