



# **Maturity in Christ**

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As we begin, I have two questions to reflect upon.

What are the sorts of things you look forward to?

What are some of the goals that you set and work hard at achieving?

For me, I was really looking forward to going to a few games of footy this year, KYCK, and going somewhere for holidays sometime later in the year.

I love goals and so often have way too many. I have goals at the gym, goals for knocking down the mortgage, and I have goals in my ministry groups.

The things we look forward to and the things that we set goals for and work hard at, are often the things that are most important to us. And now, in the current situation, many of those things (not all, but many), have been taken from us.

In some ways this is sad, as the diversity of these things is often what gives us balance and helps us to enjoy this world that God has given us.

But also, it does give us a time to slow down and reflect upon what is ultimately important.

Which brings me to some questions. As God's people:

- What is it that we, in this lifetime, on this earth, should desire?
- What is it that we, as Christians, should set our mind on?
- What is it that we should work hard at or labour for?

Today, we are going to spend some time thinking about the answers to those questions as we look at Colossians 1:28-29.

Before I re-read these verses, a little bit of context.

In the verses that have come before, Paul has painted an incredible picture of Jesus. Verses 15-23 are often called 'the cosmic Christ' and they speak about how great Jesus is, that he is supreme over

everything. It's a picture of the bigness, the hugeness, the incredibleness of Jesus.

From that, these verses speak of the depth of sacrifice that Jesus made for his people to offer them forgiveness.

After that, in verses 24-27 Paul talks about what it means to be a servant of the gospel. The joy, the suffering, and the hope that comes with being a servant of the gospel. All this brings us to verses 28-29. Let's read:

***“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.***

***For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerful works within me.” (ESV)***

As we look at these verses, we are going to answer 2 questions.

First, **what is it that we as God's people, are to be doing?**

Verse 28 - 'Him we proclaim'

The 'Him' is Jesus. Jesus 'is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, the one who created and sustains all things, 'in him all things hold together'.

Jesus is supreme over all things; he is King of kings and Lord of lords.

And Jesus is the one who made peace for us with God. Who reconciles us with God, through his blood shed on the cross.

Jesus is greater than any other and Jesus humbled himself more than any other, for your sake, for my sake.

Therefore, 'Him we proclaim'!

When you have something worth proclaiming, you do so. Think about something or someone in your life who is awesome.

The other day I was watching a replay of a Tigers Eels game from 2009.

Yeah I know, I'm getting a bit desperate for footy but what happened was that one of my favourite players, Benji Marshall went on a run and beat a bunch of players and then went screaming towards the sideline and drew in two players and then did a flick pass behind his back, straight onto the wingers chest, who slammed the ball down for a try and I went ... WOW!!!

And then I called to Lauren and said 'Lauren! you have to see this' and so I re-winded it and showed her and she went, 'WOW, that really was good!'

And I did that because that's what you do when you come in contact with greatness. Benji's pass was pure footballing genius. But he pales in comparison to Jesus.

Jesus - who he is, what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do is by far greater than anything else you have ever known. Therefore, it stands to reason that we proclaim him. His birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his offer of forgiveness and eternal life. His call on our lives and that he is coming back again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to judge the living and the dead.

But what does 'Proclaiming Jesus' look like?

Well, the next part of verse 28 gives us some instructions, and especially gives the leaders of our church some instructions about what we are to be on about. It says that we are to 'Warn' and 'Teach' everyone with all wisdom.

This instruction means the role of a church pastor is a little bit like the role of a Navman. The Navman is there in your car to help you get to your final destination. It does so through a couple of means. Firstly, it instructs you with the direction. So, in 800m turn left. Secondly, it warns you where you have gone off track, when you are going the wrong way or even, if you set the speed limit warning it tells you when you are doing the wrong thing.

It's the second of these that Paul speaks about first. He says that his role, and the church leader's role, and flowing on from that the role for all of us as Christian brothers and sisters, is to warn or admonish our fellow Christians when we are going off track... and we are to do so in love and with compassion.

One of the huge ways that this is to be done is in the pulpit each week. As in, it is the preacher's role to teach the word of God in such a way as to convict us of our sin.

This is why those who grace the pulpit cannot be soft on sin. Those who are preachers are to lead God's people into a deep understanding of God's word and not just speak fluffy words, but words that convict us to the core, that reveal our blind spots and words that cause us to change what we do because we have been shown, from God's word, the error of our way.

Because, to not do so would be unloving. To not do so would be like having a Navman that never told you when you made a wrong turn and just let you drive off the cliff and into the ocean.

A quote I heard while preparing this sermon goes like this - 'The spiritual health of the church depends on the health of the pulpit'. And this is true! But it's not the whole picture, because for those who are not preachers, which is most of you listening, the role we have in lovingly, with compassion, warning each other when we go off the track is huge. The message of the gospel is a message about what we are saved from (sin and judgement) and a message of what we are saved to.

Which is where we come to next. The Navman, and Paul, and our church is not only to warn but to teach. What is the right way? What does it look like to follow Jesus faithfully? What does the Bible say about the things that we should be seeking to do in following Jesus?

God's word instructs us of the right way to live! Because of this, proclaiming Christ through teaching God's word is central to the health of a church.

And so, the answer to our 1<sup>st</sup> question, 'what are we to do?' is that we are to Proclaim Christ through warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom.

This brings us to our second question.

**And that is – Why are we doing this? What is our aim? What is our goal?**

What are we hoping to achieve by proclaiming Christ and warning and teaching everyone?

(I know, that's four questions trying to express one question!)

The answer (to all those questions) is our goal is to **present everyone mature in Christ!**

And the way this is spoken about in Hebrews and Ephesians is using the example of an infant - a baby or a toddler.

When a toddler throws a tantrum over the silliest of things, we kind of get it; we understand; they are two; they have an excuse. But the goal, as they grow up is to help them to move out of that stage and eventually be a fully functioning adult. And I would think that if at 32 they throw the same tantrum over not getting a lollipop, we would probably think that they have failed.

In the Christian life it is the same. We can't expect someone who has just become a Christian to calmly quote Calvin into a difficult situation, and we can't expect the new Christian to have it all sorted out. But the goal is the same - to move on, to grow up in our love and knowledge of Christ to be people who are solid and firm in our Christian faith.

But how do we do this? How do we achieve this goal?

Well, we work hard at it and rely on God's Spirit to work inside us as we do so.

In verse 29 Paul says, 'For this I toil'. From this we learn that the work of growing into maturity in Christ as a church, is just that - hard labour, hard toil - and it requires, as I have already stated, faithful biblical leadership from the pulpit. Preachers who sweat it out in the preparation process seeking to wrestle with deep theological truths and to apply them to our current situations.

But also, it requires a commitment from us all, to spiritual discipline. What I mean by that - it's just like, in order to get strong at the gym, I have to do the heavy lifting and be committed to turning up regularly and having discipline even in the things I eat and the amount I sleep. We, as a church, as families, as friendship groups, need to be committed to the things that spiritually strengthen us - reading our Bibles, stretching our understanding by reading them alongside a solid commentary, getting to Bible Study, committing to prayer, singing out the praises of God day by day, encouraging each other, resisting temptation, confessing our sin, turning up to online church, listening to other faithful sermons, saying yes to what is good and goodly and saying no to what is not, and not wasting all of our time on all sorts of random things and then claiming that we 'don't have time or energy for the things of God'.

This time in lockdown, or kind of in lockdown, is a unique time, but a time with many benefits.

1. It is hard, and often it is when life is hard that we grow the most – *James 1 says, 'consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds for the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.'*

**Often it is when life is hard that we grow the most.**

2. It is a time when many of our idols, as well as many of our distractions, have been taken away.

And,

3. It's a time where many of us have more time.

In six months' time, or twelve months, or whenever the restrictions are lifted, we are probably all going to find all sorts of ways to become busy.

The question is - at that time, six months or twelve months down the track, whenever it is - what will you have done with this time?

Will you have used it to get closer to your goal of watching every TV show ever invented? Or will you have used it building up a pattern of spiritual disciplines that you will have with you for the rest of your life?

Will you have used it complaining about not having footy or parties or your eyebrows plucked? Or will you have used it proclaiming Jesus, in word, life and deed.

Will you have taken a holiday from God, skipping the heavy bits of the sermon because it seems too long and you can just press fast forward? Or will you have laboured, faithfully seeking to grow yourself, and others, in maturity in Christ, empowered by God's Holy Spirit?

I can't get massively strong at the gym - they shut the gym and the public chin up bar. I can't look forward to the footy on the weekend - it's not on. I can't take a group to KYCK in a weeks' time or go, well, anywhere really. But I can do the things that help me and others to grow into maturity in Christ, knowing that it's often during the hard times that God changes us the most!

Amen.