

Lord of Mystery

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[0 : 00] Anyways, without further ado, we're going to jump into the next part of the Colossians series, which we're in, which is looking at how Jesus is Lord and unpacking what that looks like and how that looks like in our lives. We're going to be in Colossians 2 verses 1 to 7 today. So if you have a Bible, you can go ahead and turn there. If not, there's going to be stuff up on the screen, scriptures up on the screen you could read along with me. Okay, so it says this, for I, this is a guy named the Apostle Paul, he's writing this letter to a church in Colossae.

And so he says, 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, 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 is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in the body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

And so what we see here in this passage, it's actually a continuation of another thought that Paul was speaking about in previous verses. It's his ministry to the church and his ministering for the church and on the church's behalf. And we touched on some of that last Sunday, but in this passage, he goes in to explain a little bit more of what that looks like. He talks again about this great struggle that he has for the church, this great love that he's working out in his life, this toil, this giving of himself for their sake. Now, in this particular passage, it's referring to a specific struggle, a specific way he's toiling for them, and it's in prayer for the church.

See, he knows that the reality of the church following Jesus, holding firm to the faith, will not be easy. And that's true in the context that he was writing into. And let's be honest, that's difficult to do today, even for us. And though Paul would love to be with them face to face in order to help them out and to teach them, in his absence, far away, he's writing this letter to let them know, hey, I am fighting for you. Even in my absence, even though I'm not with you in person, I am fighting for you and with you in prayer and through prayer. And what Paul is showing us is one of the transformations that happens to a person when they're captivated by Jesus. See, what we see is we love what he loves. And Jesus loves his people. He loves his people, the church, so much so that he doesn't distinguish between himself or the church. When you think about in Acts, the apostle Paul, before he became the apostle Paul, he was this dude named Saul persecuting the church, and Jesus stops him on the way to persecution. He says, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Such is the oneness Jesus has with his church. To persecute the church, to mistreat the church, is to mistreat Jesus. And therefore, to love the church, to love his people, is an act of loving Jesus and flows out of our love for Jesus.

[3 : 22] You can't love Jesus and hate his church. You can't love Jesus and hate his people. It doesn't work out that way. And it doesn't matter what her condition is, you know? And let's be honest, sometimes, church, we could be a little rough. We could be a little scruffy. We could be a little judgmental. We could be a little from the outside heart to get along with. But still, we're called to love her and pray for her. I mean, if you think about how Jesus loved and prayed for his church, John 17 is this whole prayer for his church. Not just his disciples in that moment, man. He's praying for the disciples of all time. The book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus, the ascended king, seated on the throne at the right hand of the Father, he is ever interceding for us, praying for us constantly.

Likewise, disciples captivated by Jesus tend towards the same practice of laboring in prayer. And not just for themselves, but for God's people, for his church. And like Jesus's prayers, Paul's prayers for the Colossians has a very specific focus. We don't see in any of Paul's prayers for the

church, either in this letter or any other letters, for them to be healed of sickness, to get better jobs, to make more money. He doesn't even pray for their happiness. What he does is he prays in a specific way, and it's this. Our best prayers are for Jesus to be formed in us. Now, you might hear that. It's an odd phrase, right? Jesus formed in us. That might sound like a very odd idea to you. And honestly, it is. Especially if you're here and you're not a Christian. Jesus formed into you. What is that like? What does that mean? Does that mean he takes over your body? Does that mean he takes over your personhood, your personality? You stop being yourself? I mean, that doesn't sound nice, right? It might even sound controlling and oppressive. But actually, think about this. It isn't really that odd of an idea. See, we all have people that we look up to, right? We all have heroes in our life. People that we see as the gurus of things that we really enjoy or we want to get better at. And those people, they are the model of what we want to become. We look at them. So what do we do? We buy their books, or we follow them on Twitter, or we copy their workouts or their life and how they're doing things. See, we want to learn how they do life, how they live specifically. So hopefully, we, like them, can recreate their success for ourselves. And if you and I think about this honestly, what is happening is even though it's you working that out, that person and who he is is literally being formed in you. You're becoming like them, at the very least in your habits. And for Christians, that is supposed to be Jesus. We don't look outside to other gurus to have them form in us. We look to Jesus and him alone. And that is what Paul is praying in this passage. Again, it says, I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and those at Laodicea. And he goes on to say, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding of the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It's interesting, right? We're going to get into how Jesus is formed in us. But it's interesting that Paul doesn't start out with, this is how Jesus is formed in you, right? He starts with what's going to happen when Jesus is formed in us. He gives evidences of what that looks like. In verse 2, right? That their hearts may be encouraged, right? They're being knit together in love. And here's the thing. What he is saying, actually, underneath it, is you will lose a lot as Jesus is formed in you.

Now, that's a very provocative statement because that scripture I just read is about what is added to us, right? It looks like, man, hey, no, following Jesus, being him formed in us, I get an encouraged heart. That's something new. That's being added to me. I get to be knit together in love with other people. That sounds great. I mean, we all want to be more secure and confident and have a bunch of BFFs, right? That's like the good life. But actually, there's a lot more implied here. There's a lot more implied and there is a cause and effect, right? It isn't that we get encouraged hearts and BFFs.

[7 : 40] It says this, right? Having been knit together in love, your hearts will be encouraged. So that is, the being knit together in love is the cause, the effect, the result is that we will have encouraged hearts. So what he's saying is this, it is through loving community that our hearts are encouraged, strengthened, established, secure in our faith, secure as people, which to be honest, if you think about it, it flies in the face of today's orthodoxy. By our cultural moment, that's not what it preaches and teaches to us. It says community is great. And community is good for like, you know, having fun and hanging out, but you don't really need community to be secure, to find confidence. I mean, we are told that all we have to do is find it in ourselves. We just need to speak truth to ourselves, to accept ourselves and to learn, to learn to love ourselves more. And the result of that is growing in self-esteem, being a more strong and secure and confident person. And that's partly right. Words, truth, do have to fill our hearts in order for that to happen. That word encouraged here, that word encouraged that Paul uses in this verse means to speak to you, to call to you, to call into you with instruction, comfort, and admonition. It's a speaking reality. It's not devoid. It's not just like, oh, I feel encouraged. No, to be encouraged in heart means something has to happen first. A truth has to be spoken into it. An admonition, an instruction has to be given in before your heart can begin to feel encouraged. But today we're told you can do this for yourself. You could do this to yourself. But the

Bible says, no, it actually has to come from outside of you. See, the best, most secure version of who we can be, you and me, the best, most secure version can't happen apart from community. Now, we think about this, we're like, sweet, yeah, that makes sense. I'll just get into community. I mean, how bad could it really be? I'll come to church a little bit here and there and use community to get what I need.

But that idea, the way approaching community that way, it doesn't work. And this is where we find the costliness of what this passage is talking about. This is where we start to see that to get something great, like what Paul is saying, first, you and I have to lose a lot. See, the idea of community, the community in Christian faith is this deep commitment to unity and oneness, which is why Paul uses this language, this like amazing picture of hearts being knit together in love. It's the, it's the same idea, the same picture as God gives us when he brings two individuals together in the marriage covenant in union, the two people become one flesh. And so there's this idea of what Christian community looks like. It's that, it's that same closeness, it's that same oneness that we're meant to experience hearts being, two hearts being knit together in love. And this doesn't mean romantic love, this is talking about committed covenantal love, committed covenantal relationship, which is I'm with you through thick and thin, that type of love, no matter what. And you know what, to be honest, guys, this type of love really isn't talked about today. It really isn't focused on today. It's not really celebrated.

The kind of love that often gets celebrated is the romantic love, right? And romantic love, to be honest, isn't that costly, not as costly as commitment love. And so what we see is that this, our culture today, in its pursuit of romantic love and its diminishment of commitment and covenantal community, our culture today proves this passage to be true. We are more individualistic than we have ever been.

We live more isolated lives. And what has been the result of that over the years? There's been a notable uptick in depression. There's been a notable uptick in insecurity, in chaos, people just having high anxiety, lacking comfort and peace. All those things are constantly on the rise. At the same time, that more individualistic living is also on the rise. And this isn't me just like wanting to prove a point. This is non-Christian experts pointing this out. The data is all over the place. So why don't we just get ourselves out of this, right? It's like, man, if it's that bad, why don't we just stop and start being committed to community more? To be honest, it's because being individualistic is so much easier. That statement, knit together in love, hearts knit together in love, that sounds really cool. That sounds really nice and poetic. And it's like, man, I want to experience that. But guys, that's also a human impossibility. And let me explain. See, we all have a heart.

[12:54] And, you know, a lot of what is talked about in the heart is to understand and know that that's the place that's at the core of who we are. It's the seedbed of our desires. It's that place where our desires live and flow out of. It's the place of our will. And consider how often people's will and desires are in sync. I mean, if you think about a good group of friends trying to get together and figure out where to eat, right? The more people you add to that equation, the more like disunity there is in the conversation, you know? I want to eat over. Well, how about this? Well, I'm in the mood for this. My wife and I, we like different movies, sports and hobbies. We have different desires. We have different will. So the point is, is that we all have these competing desires, right? We all have these competing wills and we want ours to win out, right? We want ours to supersede everyone else's.

And then you add to that this underlying belief that, man, our desires are good. And therefore, if they're good, then I should pursue them and go after them so that, man, my happiness is dependent on me fulfilling those desires. And that is why communal oneness, this knitting of hearts, is actually impossible to obtain. It's impossible for us to attain as human beings. That is, unless we are all submitted and surrendered to one will. Now, our sensibilities tell us that, hey, this isn't good. I'm going to lose my freedom. I'm going to lose myself. I'm going to have to let go of things. I don't want to do that. I don't want to let go of my will. But here's the thing. You can't have it both ways. You can't live knit together in community and hold on to your will at all costs. You know, people often, they'll come to church and they'll wonder, they want to know two things. Will I be loved and can I have it in my way? And the answer to the first question is always yes. And the answer to the second question is always no. And Jesus echoes this. He says, whoever holds on to their life is going to lose it. And, but whoever loses their life for my sake is going to find it. See this, this knitting of hearts that we so desire and we want, man, it is costly. It is likened to losing your life. But it isn't a call to a literal death. What we are called to die to, what you and I are called to lose and surrender is our will. And not just a little of it, guys, all of it. We are called to lay our desires down. We are called to lay down our will to Jesus's and surrender to his. And that is why salvation through Jesus begins with recognizing him as not just savior, but a lord to surrender to.

He is both savior that forgives our sins, right? And lord whose will I surrender to. He's the king, not me. And when we believe and receive Jesus as savior and lord, we are immediately knitted to Jesus's heart, which means his heart becomes our heart. God forecast this particular part of salvation before Jesus came. Ezekiel 11:19 says, I'm going to give my people one heart, one heart. You're going to have one desire, one will, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. What God is promising here, what he's forecasting here is that through salvation in Jesus, he would transform us at the very core of who we are.

He is going to go after our iron will and replace it. Replace it with a new heart, with new desires, and a new will, which is his. And therefore, Christians everywhere, you and I, all of us in this room, we're connected to one and the same heart now. And it's Jesus's heart. And so yes, we can be knit together in love. And it just proves the point, man, this isn't something that you and I can pull off apart from God. This is a work of God. This is a grace work that he gives to us.

[17:26] Sounds great, right? But here's the wrestle you and I have. This is the wrestle your pastor has. This is the wrestle I know you all have, Christian or not. Our hearts constantly question, is it worth it?

Even when we come into community, even when God has replaced our heart of stone and given us a heart of flesh and we have this like, you know, one will, one desire him, and there's a part of us still that says, man, is it worth it? Is what I gain in Jesus worth what I'm losing? Which is really to state the question this way, what makes his will better than mine? That's at the heart of that. When we stop and say, man, is it worth it? What we're saying and what we're wondering is, is his will, is his desires, is his way better than mine? Now that is a good thing to consider, to be honest. I'm not saying, how dare you? I'm saying, yeah, let's consider that. Let's dive into what that looks like. What makes one person's will? What makes one person's desire better than another's? See? Because we're all born with them, right? But here's the thing, along the way, those desires that we originally have, they change. They get shaped. They become more informed through knowledge along the way. Toddlers, babies crawling around, they have a desire and a will to stick forks in electric sockets, right?

Now we wouldn't say like, oh, that's a really good, that's, yeah, they're really well informed. They have a lot of knowledge and wisdom in that situation. Like parents, we're like, no, that's not okay. We're going to keep you from doing that because we know what's going to happen. And so the point is, as we grow, we gain more and more knowledge and more and more wisdom through the experiences of life and our wills and our desires get shaped and reshaped through that until we reach our teens and realize we know everything, right? Teenagers, I'm not picking on you, I love. I was a teenager once and I was convinced that I had it all figured out. So, but seriously, what I'm saying here is all of our life, all of our life, we learn more and more through experience and this pursuit of knowledge. And it's, we get older, our will and our desires are shaped. We get wiser, we learn things, we fail and we're like, not going to do that again. Or, hey, that worked, that's a good thing, I'm going to do that again. Which is why, if you think about it, like in every culture, even today, throughout history, they've always equated wisdom with age. The older you get, the assumption is the wiser you become.

There's a connection there. We think about those guys earlier in the Bible, in the beginning of Genesis, who lived like more than 900 years. I mean, those were probably some wise dudes, right? They probably saw a lot of stuff. Way wiser than people that live, you know, into their 40s or 50s. But here's the thing, they can't compare with Jesus. And he is ageless. I mean, think about that.

[20:26] If age is equated with wisdom, and Jesus is ageless, what does that mean? He isn't just kind of wise. He isn't just like really, really wise. He doesn't just know a lot of things. He actually is wisdom.

He actually is knowledge. And that's what Colossians is telling us. In whom? In Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And see what happens here. In Jesus, you may feel, you and I may feel the agony of surrender to his will. But what we begin to realize is that what we've gained is a perfect, higher, completely full, informed will that is shaped by unmatched wisdom. And so in light of what you lose and giving up and surrendering your will, actually what you gain isn't just a little bit better. It is exponential. It's incomparably better. Nothing compares to it. You actually end up gaining everything, which is what happens. You gain everything as Jesus is formed in you.

And these rewards that we gain, they're not material rewards, right? And it's not money and mansions and Mercedes-Benz. That's not what we're after in Jesus. Actually, it is the riches of Jesus that we're after.

It's him that we desire. It's him that we want. He is the mystery that we are growing in and he is being formed in us. And the things that happen in that are superior in every way, right? Because they're not, it's not just stuff that we're getting from him. What we are getting is a person. We are getting all that is Jesus Christ. He gives us all of himself. He doesn't hold it back, which is why Paul is praying for the church this way. He wants them to reach all the riches that are to be found in Jesus Christ. And here's the thing, guys. The longer you and I remain in Jesus, the more we begin to realize there is no end to how wonderful he is. It's like experiencing perfect love and then in the next moment finding out that, oh, I thought that was perfect love. I just experienced even more perfect love. And that cycle just continues on in infinity. That's what it's like to know Jesus. We read in Isaiah 6, the angels are singing this thing around the throne, holy, holy, holy. And they're beholding God's glory. And what they're saying is,

I'm seeing something new. I'm seeing something I haven't seen before. Guys, they've been singing that forever, right? That should tell us something. Seeing and beholding Jesus, growing up in Jesus, Christ being formed in us, it's not a boring thing. It is an endless pursuit. There is no end to the riches that are in Christ Jesus. It's not boring. It's not hopeless, man. What that does, it makes our heart sing. The more of Jesus formed in us, the more, man, we realize that what life really is and what it's really about. And that's what we're called to build our lives on. It's on him. It's on Jesus. [23 : 40] And Paul gets to this in verse six. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. This isn't a call to earn your salvation. It is a call to remain and abide in Jesus Christ. Remain and abide in him. Remain and abide in his love. Remain and abide in him. And as you do that, he forms more, he is formed in you. And that's the thing. Jesus can't be formed in us if we don't follow him. These verses say that there is a journey of discipleship whose end destination is the fullness of Christ. And Paul is struggling in his prayer for the church, for Jesus' disciples, for you and me, that we will reach that. We will reach all the riches of understanding and knowing Jesus' man. He wants us to get there. He wants us to grow up in Christ. He wants our faith to be rooted and grounded. And so he tells the man, as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, the Lord, so walk in him. This isn't Paul giving a good suggestion. This is him commanding the church as disciples of Jesus Christ. Walk in him. Walk in Christ. But what does that mean? What does it mean to walk in Jesus? See, this little idiom in that day was a way to understand of what it means to be a disciple. It's a picture of discipleship, right? See, in Jesus' day, discipleship had two parts, right? There was a teacher and there was a disciple. And that was very common. But the relationship wasn't like a student in a classroom, you know, a guy at the chalkboard teaching stuff and then writing notes and then the class dispersed and everyone goes their way. No, this idea of discipleship is more like an apprentice learning a trade. See, disciples not only learn from what their teacher said, they learn from what their teacher did. Until their work became indistinguishable from their teacher.

Then anyone could go to the apprentice's work and they see the teacher in it. They would see the teacher in that apprentice's work and they could tell who he had been apprenticed by. But that could only happen as that apprentice walked and committed to walking in the way of their teacher. And so to walk in Christ is to learn and to obey what he taught. But it is also to imitate his life. It is to live how he lived.

It is to do what he did. And so when people look at our life, what should they see? They should see Jesus. Just like, man, a carpenter, apprenticing someone. And when they look at his apprentice's work at the end of the day, if he did a good job and his apprentice was faithful, they could see the teacher's work in whatever that carpenter made. And so it's the same with us.

But then how do we do that? How do we live this imitation of Christ in our lives? How do we walk in him? Well, first, it takes intentionality. You have to realize that it takes intentionality. It is not just going to passively happen. We have to do things. We have to act. We have to practice the ways of Christ.

Christ, right? We look at Christ's life, man. He filled himself with scripture. He grew in knowledge. He grew in knowledge of the scripture. He filled himself with that. He was a prayer. Jesus prayed. He prayed to the Father. You see Jesus, what he did, he was constantly showing how he was

faithfully surrendered to the Father's will. He was committed to discipling in community. He was a man committed to community. And he was always present with people. Whoever was right in front of him, he was always present with them. And these, again, these aren't ways that we try to earn God's favor. These are ways that we are built up in Jesus. And when we do these things, when we practice these ways of living in Christ, we get more rooted in our faith. Our faith grows deep. We begin to drink richly. We are established in our faith, right? We get more secure, like building on a solid foundation. It's not easily, we're not easily shaken. And then we're built up. We mature. We grow up into Christ. We become more confident in God's love. We become more faithful and trusting in who he is and in his will. And we become more discerning of what is true and what is not. [28 : 33] So here's the question for us today in response to this. What is Jesus calling you to do today? How is he calling you to respond? I want to ask you, consider your life.

Some of us here, we need to surrender our will. We need to make Jesus our Lord and Savior. Some of us here need to surrender more of our will. What do people see when they look at your life?

Do they see your Savior? Or do they see something else? What is the adjustment Jesus is calling you and I to make today? Let me pray.

Jesus, there is no greater reward than you. Man, we can give ourselves to so many things. We could prioritize our life in such a way that you aren't first, you aren't second, you're just way down the list. It's easy to do that.

Lord, it's easy to try to redefine what it looks like to walk as a disciple, to walk in you, rooted and grounded in you. But Lord, this challenges us, this arrests our attention.

[30 : 03] And Lord, you're inviting us not into a boring, meaningless, joyless life. Man, as you are formed in us, Lord, we experience life. We've been singing so much today already about how in you there is freedom and how you set us free. Reminding what Paul wrote to the Galatian church, man, it is for freedom's sake that Christ has set us free. And you know what? We need freedom from our own wills. We need to be saved from ourselves. And Lord, I pray that as we realize, as we do that, we realize, yes, it is costly and it feels like we are losing too much. But then as we come to know you, as we grow in you and you grow in us, we realize, man, your will, your purpose, your plan, who you are is so much better, so much better. And I pray, Lord, for us as a church, as your people here today, that we would respond with saying, you know what?

Man, help me, Lord, help me to be more surrendered to your will. Help me to be more rooted and grounded in you, Jesus Christ. Help me to live as you live. I pray for my friends here who are wrestling for the first time. Man, do I surrender? Is it worth it to give my life, to surrender my will and make Jesus my Lord and Savior? I pray, man, that you would convince them today. It wouldn't just be a truth that they're listening, but man, they would experience how good you are, Jesus Christ, how much they need you and surrender to you. Amen.