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Colossians 4:2-4

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<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

When you think of being devoted to something, what comes to mind?

Your work?

You've been working for the same company or you've been in the same trade for years or even decades...

Monday–Friday (maybe the occasional weekend) for as long as you can remember...

You wake up and faithfully head off to the same place...

That's devotion.

Is it your family?

You spend hours every day caring for them:

Cooking meals, volleyball matches, caring for sick kids, and aging parents.

That's devotion.

Maybe it makes you think of devotionals...

Those things we do or we're supposed to do to help grow in our relationship with the Lord...

So maybe being devoted feels like a burden to you.

In our passage this morning we're instructed to devote ourselves to prayer.

Put in the effort...

Commit yourself to it...

Be strong and hold fast to prayer.

The Lord is saying this to us through his word...

But first he is saying it to the Christ followers in Colossae.

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

Paul is writing this letter to the Colossians to keep them on path—growing as Christ’s disciples...

He wants to see them continue on the way of maturity in discipleship.

If we look at the letter as a whole...

We get the sense that there’s something bad going on in Colossae...

There’s teaching, beliefs, and a philosophy that runs against the gospel message.

We’re not told what exactly this new teaching entails...

But we’re given some generalities:

It involved telling them what could eat and drink...

What special days and festivals they had to recognize and celebrate (2:16);

It involved taboos on what they could and could not touch (2:21);

It also involved angel worship (2:18).

The new philosophy or teaching supposedly offered ways to attain secret knowledge...

Knowledge that was reserved only for the spiritually elite...

It taught that humans could access those things above (higher knowledge) by seeking out intermediaries...

Different spiritual go-betweens (angels, elemental spirits, principalities)—

And you had to do certain practices of self-discipline to help get this knowledge.

Paul was concerned that this teaching was leading people off course...

He feared that it was taking away from the gospel message of Christ...

And attracting Christ followers to this new alternative.

It was teaching fulfillment in life, but it was teaching it in ways outside of Christ.

Now for us this is very relatable.

We desire fulfillment.

And the world today offers it in abundance:

Money, sex, careers, relationships—just to name a few

But I want to highlight one specifically.

One way that I've noticed this creeping into my life is through information.

If I just *know* enough, then I'll be fulfilled...

If I gain enough wisdom, then I'll be satisfied

I'll be...content...happy.

And today we're offered more information than we can swallow.

Recent data tells us that there are over 550,000 podcasts out there...

They've estimated that to be almost 19 million episodes.

If we conservatively estimate each episode at 15 minutes then that's 285,000,000 minutes of podcast out there...

And that comes out to be somewhere over 500 years' worth of podcasts.

That's just information from podcasts.

On our computers, phones, and tablets we have access to millions of articles...

We have information on everything from the meaning of life, to the latest fashion trends, to diets that will help me shed 10 pounds in 10 weeks.

And of course there are libraries of books.

I get emails from different publishers telling me when an author has a new book coming out.

So I get excited about the prospect of learning something new...

And then I get anxious as I add it to the growing list of books I want to read.

Now, I'm not saying that education is bad—

Learning is definitely not bad—

And passing time or being entertained by a podcast is alright...

But I think it's good if we check our motivations.

Why do we as a society crave so much information and knowledge?

Is it because we enjoy learning...

Or is there something deeper?

Are we like the Colossian church, that's subtly being tempted away from Christ?

Are we buying the lie that says that knowledge will bring fulfillment?

That we can attain divine wisdom—wisdom that will lead to contentment—

By just *knowing* enough...

It takes us back to the fall of humanity when Eve saw the fruit on the tree...

She saw that it was desirable for gaining wisdom...(Gen 3:6)

She was tempted by the *knowledge* of good and evil.

It was man and woman's attempt at being like God...

Being independent of God.

Their quest for knowledge and independence ultimately messed everything up.

They introduced sin into the world...

And caused death and brokenness to spread through all of God's creation:

From fighting and killing between humans...

To a creation that groans with pain and responds with floods, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes and hurricanes.

Is our quest for knowledge just a 21<sup>st</sup> century expression of our earliest sin?

Paul counters the new teaching and philosophy at Colossae by turning to Christ.

He says, "Make sure that no one takes you captive through empty philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world...*rather than on Christ.*" (2:8)

"You have been given fullness in Christ." (2:9)

All the knowledge that's needed for salvation...

Needed for entering into the divine realm...

Needed for experiencing divine fullness...

It's all found in Christ.

There's no need to look anywhere else...

Christ is our all in all.

This is the mystery that Paul mentions in verse 3 of our passage...

“The mystery of Christ.”

See, for the philosophy being taught in Colossae, there was a secret knowledge for the spiritually elite...

You had to do certain things...

Contact intermediary spiritual beings...

And receive visions from them.

Knowledge was hidden except for those privileged few.

But Paul comes in and says:

“No! We want to proclaim the *real* mystery!”

“I want to share with the world the *real* secret!”

Christ is that mystery! Who he is and what he’s done:

Christ is the image of the invisible God. (1:15)

He is the firstborn over all creation. (1:15)

By him all things were created. (1:16)

And all things were created for him. (1:16)

All things hold together in him. (1:17)

All of the fullness of God dwells in Christ.

And through Christ all things are reconciled...

Christ made peace through his blood that was shed on the cross.

So now we are put back into right relationship with God.

Where once there was division and a fractured relationship with God...

Now there is healing and restoration for those in Christ...

In him we have the forgiveness of sins.

Paul is telling the Christians in Colossae that Christ is all that’s needed...

Nothing more and nothing less.

You don’t have to seek out angels or other mystical spirits;

You don’t have to stop eating certain foods...

Or punishing yourself hoping for a vision from the realm of the divine.

All that you will ever need is Christ.

And 2,000 years later the same still holds true for us.

All that we need is Christ.

We don't need endless information and knowledge...

We don't need to guilt and punish ourselves to the point where we feel like we deserve forgiveness...

Because we don't.

We'll never *deserve* forgiveness.

We deserve judgment and eternal condemnation for our sin...

For the ways we've tried to play God and do things on our own...

And for the ways that we've separated ourselves from him.

It's only by the work of Christ that we're healed and restored...

It's only by the blood of Christ that our relationship with God is made good again.

Christ is our connection to the Divine...

He is our access to the Trinity...

To that relationship we were meant to live in...

This relationship that brings fullness of life.

And this is where Paul's command comes in:

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

Prayer is our lifeline to Christ.

We live in a cunning world...

It's an attractive place that ever...so...slowly entices us away from our Lord and source of life.

Our enemy patiently waits for little opportunities to chip away at the foundation of our faith.

"All you need is that little bonus at work...then you'll be content."

"All you need is that one right person in your life...then you'll be happy."

"All you need is to get away from your spouse...then life will be better."

“All you need is more knowledge...people will think you’re smart and you’ll feel better about yourself.”

Slowly but surely we believe the lies...

It’s all around us;

On our TVs, on the internet ads, in FB feeds...it’s in the air we breathe.

And so we’re commanded to devote ourselves to prayer...

Commit to it...

Be strong in it...

Hold on to it and don’t let it go.

Our ability to accept life depends on it;

Our ability to faithfully walk through sickness and death depends on it;

Our ability to live obedient lives depends on it;

Our marriages, relationships, and families depend on it;

The vision God has for our church depends on it;

Our growth and maturity as disciples depends on prayer...

Because in prayer we connect with Christ, our source of life...

Who is our all in all.

But more than that...

Proclamation of the gospel message depends on it.

There are people out there who don’t know the joy of Christ.

Life is hard enough knowing that God still holds the world in his hands.

People who think they can earn their way into God’s favor.

Who exhaust themselves trying to be good enough...

Or people who have given up on life because of the intense pain and guilt they feel over their broken lives.

There are people out there living in darkness and despair because they think that what they see is all there is...

They’ve never heard the truth about God’s redeeming love.

They don’t know that God gave us Jesus Christ to restore all things.

They don't know that there's a sure hope of peace.

Paul says "pray for us, that God will open up a door for our message..."

"So that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ." (4:3)

We know that it is only God who opens eyes and softens hearts to the gospel message...

And so we pray that he would remove obstacles—

Any obstacle that stands in the way of the gospel being proclaimed and received.

Brothers and sisters there is a big world out there...

And it's full of a lot of pain, sin, darkness, misguidance, and despair.

But the mystery of Christ has been revealed to us.

A mystery that proclaims forgiveness of sin, and fullness of life for those in Christ.

Let us turn our gaze outward, and devote ourselves to the one who is this world's all in all.

Let's pray.