

# *Literally Crammed Full of Jesus*

## Colossians 1:24-2:5

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ April 16, 2023 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church



<sup>24</sup> I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. <sup>25</sup> I became its minister according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil and strive with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

<sup>1</sup> For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face. <sup>2</sup> I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. <sup>5</sup> For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your orderly conduct and the firmness of your faith in Christ. (Colossians 1:24-2:5, NRSV)



Is it worth the sacrifice? Isn't that a question you have asked yourself a thousand times? My doctor tells me I need a shoulder replacement. He admits I'm a bit young to start having joints replaced, but I need one nonetheless. And so I'm asking myself... is it worth the sacrifice? At this point the pain is manageable. Is the pain I will go through with a surgery and rehab worth the new and functioning shoulder I'm told I will have in the end? That's the question I'm asking. Anytime you try to get yourself into physical shape you ask that question. Is the pain of all those miles, all those reps, of all that weight lifted at the gym, passing on that piece of homemade apple pie with ice cream, is the sacrifice

worth the gain of a more healthy body in the end? Lots of us asked this question in school. Is the pain of these years of study and sacrifice worth the degree I will eventually receive and the doors it might open for my career?

Sometimes the sacrifices we choose to make are for the benefit of others. Some of us here had parents who made tremendous sacrifices for years just to give us, their children, a better life. I know people who have benefitted from parents who left their homes, even their countries, worked overtime in tedious jobs they never loved, rarely if ever splurged on themselves, all so that their children might have a life they never dreamed of enjoying. Ask these parents if the sacrifice was worth it, and I suspect every one of them would tell you that yes, it absolutely was worth it.

This is what Paul is saying here when he writes, **"I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake."** Remember that Paul is writing these words from prison, locked up for his promotion of the Christian gospel. Eventually, he will be executed for the same reason. And in all this he is only following the pathway of his Lord, who before him suffered willingly for the sake of the world. Clearly, there is no question in Paul's mind, the sacrifice is well worth it.

So what is it that Paul wants for the church that is worth such sacrifice? He hints at the answer in verse 25 when he says his commission is **"to make the word of God fully known."** That word "fully" is the translation of a Greek word that implies cramming something full.<sup>1</sup> You're taking a small suitcase on a long trip because you don't want to check your bags, and so you cram it full of clothes, so much so that you have to kneel on it to zip it closed. That's the sense of the word Paul uses here. And it is this goal that makes Paul so willing to sacrifice his whole life, that men and women in the church would be crammed full of the word of God.

Now to clarify, by "word of God" I do not think that Paul simply means the Bible. We speak about the Bible as the Word of God, which it is. But the Bible is not the *preeminent* Word. In fact, people can be crammed full of the Bible and still be nothing like God. Paul, before he

<sup>1</sup> <https://studybible.info/strongs/G4137>

met Jesus, had the whole Bible memorized. But it had so little impact on his life that he went around with his memorized Bible and killed God's people in the church. Even today, it's not that hard to find people who know their Bibles very well, and yet at the same time barely resemble the author of this book. And so while I'm sure Paul does want the church to know the Word of God in their Bibles, he is first interested in us knowing the Word of God, who is Christ. Christ is the preeminent Word. Remember John 1: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."**<sup>2</sup> Paul wants us crammed full of Jesus.

Let me remind you of God's original purpose for humanity, for you and for me specifically. God made us to be in fellowship with him. That's a fancy way of saying that God made us to share life with him. God also made us in his image. That's a fancy way of saying God made us to reflect him. You should look at any of us and get a sense of God is like, especially in terms of love. And yet, we messed it all up. From Adam and Eve on down to today, we instead chose to live life apart from God and his ways, and to reflect ourselves rather than him. The word for that is sin, and it has absolutely infected humanity.

But the reason we are here this morning is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, made the most monumental sacrifice of all on our behalf to save us from the destiny we had chosen for ourselves, a sacrifice he determined was well worth it. Christ became one of us, took on human flesh as John wrote, and then suffered and died for us, and then rose from the dead and ascended to glory for us, so that everything that is wrong with this world, specifically with us, could be made right again. Fellowship with God restored. The image of God in us restored. Old things made new again, dead things brought back to life. This is the gospel, right? This is the good news that brings us to worship this morning.

The invitation now is that in response to what God has done through Christ, we would place our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as our only hope in life and death. Not just to believe in our minds, but to commit with our lives, to enroll with him as his disciples, letting him teach us how to see God's image restored in our lives, which is to live life as he would live life if he were in our shoes. There is great mystery here. Paul alludes to that fact several times in this passage. But the end result, again, is that we would be people crammed full of Jesus. Not just our minds full of the teachings and ideas

of Jesus. Not just our lives full of the habits and tendencies of Jesus. Not just our character full of the traits of Jesus. It's more than that! You and me literally full of the actual Jesus.

One of my pet peeves is when people misuse the word 'literally', which people do literally all the time. See, I just did it to test you. People don't literally do it all the time. But they do it a lot. Somebody says, "I'm literally starving." Really, are you *literally* starving? I don't think so. You are just really hungry. Or, "This country is literally going to the dogs!" No it isn't. You mean to say that the country is "figuratively" going to the dogs, which, by the way, you don't need to say. Just say it's going to the dogs. Don't get me started. But do trust me when I tell you that I'm using the word correctly when I tell you that Paul is making great sacrifices so that people like us can be *literally* crammed full of Jesus.

This is what he means in verse 27 when he writes, **"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."** That little phrase, "Christ in you", is found in one for or another about 170 times in Paul's letters. It's so familiar that we often blow right past it. We should not do so. It's a small word, "in", with profound, profound implications. Specifically, when a person understands their deadness in sin, and turns in faith to Christ as Savior to receive his grace, we not only find ourselves forgiven and favored by God, unworthy recipients of inclusion in his family as beloved sons and daughters, *but Christ himself, by the presence of the Holy Spirit, comes to take up residence in our souls.* Literally.

We get so mixed up on this point. Even Christians tend to think that God is most present in this world today in certain physical locations. For instance, people behave differently in church sanctuaries like this one because they believe God tends to spend more time in places like this. Or they travel to certain holy sites or lands because they suspect God hangs out in such places. But the scriptures are clear, God no longer makes his home in temples of stone and brick. He makes his home in temples of flesh and blood. Paul asks the church in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3:16, **"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit [literally] dwells in you?"** And remember, there is only one Holy Spirit, meaning that if you have placed your faith in Jesus, then the same Spirit that dwelled in Christ dwells is you.

If you are a Christian, do you live in awareness of this reality, that *you* are the most holy site on earth, the

<sup>2</sup> John 1:1,14. This and all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Temple of the living God? Not someday, but now! Paul doesn't say that we will one day have Christ in us. He says he is in us now! He is not just *for* us, he is *in* us, bonded to us in the deepest possible way. Remember Jesus' prayer the night he was arrested? He prays for us, for all who would eventually come to him in faith and make up the church. This is part of that prayer: **"I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us..."**<sup>3</sup>

You must be joking, Jesus! I am united to you as you are united to your Father? He's not joking. To be clear, he doesn't mean that we become divine. We do not, and will not. But there is a union with Christ that occurs in Christians that forever shapes our core identity as God's beloved children.<sup>4</sup> Jesus spoke in great detail about this union in John 15 when he told us that as his followers we are the branches and he is the vine that provides life.<sup>5</sup> Where does a vine stop and a branch begin? It's hard to tell, right? This sort of union with Christ is deeper than we can possibly comprehend.

Part of what this means is that everything that the Father gives to his Son, Jesus, he gives to us. In other words, we don't just receive Christ, but we also receive all the blessings afforded to Christ. New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, points out that when an ambassador goes to another country to represent a king or president, it is as if that king or president has paid the visit in person. In some cultures, if somebody wrongs or harms you, it is as if they had committed the offense against your whole family. These aren't exactly the same as what Paul has in mind here, but they point us in the right direction.<sup>6</sup>

What Christ did, he did for all people, meaning what is true of Christ becomes, from the Father's perspective, true of us. Christ lived a sinless life. We are credited with that life. Christ died for our sins. We find our sins atoned for in his death. Christ is resurrected to live beyond the grave. We will find ourselves tied to him in that resurrection, and even someday sharing in the glory he experiences. The love the Father has for Christ is the same love he has for us. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 1:3-4, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us**

**in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love."**

Are your minds blown yet? If not, you may not be paying attention! And there's more! This union is indissoluble. It's permanent and binding. I think of that famous passage in John 10 where Jesus is teaching that he is the Good Shepherd and we are his beloved sheep, and he declares about us, **"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."**<sup>7</sup> Nothing can separate us from Christ once Christ is truly in us. You can and will lose a lot of things in your life. Your health, your memory, your time, your money, your stuff, your loved ones, your abilities, your reputation. If you are in Christ, however, you cannot lose Christ because he will not lose you.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, he is in you, literally in you, sharing with you all the blessings of God's life and doing so forever. And if this seems too profound to understand, that's because it is! Who can understand this? Even Paul calls it a mystery. He can't explain it. I can't explain it. None of us can understand it. We simply confess it to be true. But what Paul does understand is that this "hope of glory", as he calls it, is such a treasure that it is worth any sacrifice made to attain it, not only for ourselves but for others, so much so that Paul goes as far as to say that he rejoices in his sufferings if they lead to this end. Amazing!

So here's the question I want to ask you, assuming you're still with me. You still with me? My question is this, if you have placed your faith in Christ and he is literally in you, if he has taken up residence in the temple of your life, what is he doing there right now in that temple? Have you ever thought about that? Jesus is living in you! What's he up to? Imagine if Jesus came to live with you this week in your house. You made up the guest bed, set out clean towels, bought extra food at the store, and then welcomed Jesus into your home. What do you think he would do all week as he hung out at your place? Would you tell him to make himself at home, give him full access to every thing and activity under your roof?

That's a question a preacher named Bob Munger asked

<sup>3</sup> John 17:20-21

<sup>4</sup> Theologian John Murray puts it this way: "The greatest mystery of creaturely relationships is the union of God's people with Christ, and the mystery of it is attested by nothing less than this, that it is compared to the unity that exists in the Trinity"

<sup>5</sup> John 15:5 - **"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."** I encourage you to read this whole chapter.

<sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul For Everyone: The Prison Letters* (Westminster John Knox, 2002), 158.

<sup>7</sup> John 10:28. Also, Colossians 3:23 declares, **"Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."**

many years ago in a sermon that afterwards became very famous, a sermon he called “My Heart Christ’s Home.” He imagined our heart or life as a house where Jesus comes to live after we have invited him to do so. But the house Jesus moves into is in great disrepair. And so as Jesus moves through the house room by room, each one representing some area of our life, he sees that there is much renovation that needs to happen. The ‘dining room’ is full of appetites that should not control us but do. The ‘study’ is full of thoughts which cross our mind which do harm to ourselves and others. The ‘hall closet’ hides skeletons we don’t want anybody, even Jesus, to know are there. And so on. It’s a beautiful message about how Jesus, at the invitation of the home owner, is slowly renovating the whole place one room at a time.<sup>8</sup>

The scriptures are crystal clear that at the cross the reign of sin in our lives was forever broken. And at Easter the reign of death was also destroyed. These things now have no ultimate power over us once we are in Christ and Christ is in us. But the presence of sin, along with the presence of death, is still a reality in our lives. And so just as you will still one day die before you are raised to life, you will also still sin before you one day find yourself at last totally free of its influence. You are forgiven completely<sup>9</sup>, yes, but the struggle, even war, against the sinful nature continues in our bodies, minds and hearts.

This is why Paul is willing to endure suffering as he is, so that men and women in the church who have Jesus living in them may be, in time, crammed full of Jesus, every room of the house renovated. In verse 28 he reveals that his hope is to one day “**present everyone mature in Christ.**” Do you see what he’s saying? It’s not just enough to just have Jesus in you. You need to have a life crammed full of Jesus. And the reality is that when Jesus moves into your life, he will look around the house of your life and immediately recognize that while the place has a lot of potential, there is a ton of renovation that needs to happen. Do you disagree? I don’t. There is so much in my life that is still covered with the residue of sin. And I know Jesus sees this. How can he not; he’s living in me! And while I know he doesn’t condemn me for it, he also doesn’t want to live in the mess. He doesn’t want *me* to live their either.

Now, the problem with renovations is that they are not easy. Have any of you ever done a major renovation on your house, replaced a kitchen or re-landscaped your

entire yard? It’s not just inconvenient, it’s very messy, and usually very, very costly. And that sort of home renovation, as hard as it is, is easy when compared to the renovation of the human heart, where the spiritual dry rot is absolutely pervasive. This is exactly what Jesus is referring to when he talks about us dying to ourselves and picking up our crosses daily. Again, to follow Jesus is to go where Jesus goes. And though he ultimately goes to resurrection and glory, he first goes to death. We think he means martyrdom when he talks about dying, but mostly he means this sort of death, of allowing him to put to death the sinful nature that is still in us, all the broken and corrupt parts of our lives, and then restore it all completely. By comparison, martyrdom is actually quite easy. It’s certainly takes far less time.

Are you following all this? If Jesus has indeed taken up residence in your life, he is now looking around at the house of your life and waiting for your permission and cooperation, wanting you to join him as you give him full access to the place, that he might begin the long process of renovating every square inch. He wants to replace anxiety with trust, addiction with freedom, discouragement with hope, envy with gratitude, hoarding with generosity, a critical spirit with grace, hatred with love. When we were in control of things, we developed a whole structure of habits, attitudes, perspectives, dynamics of relationships, and a way of reacting and responding to the world around us that were both harmful to us and others.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is ready to dismantle all of it, and give us a whole new way of living. Not someday after we die, but now, in this life, starting today!

Have you noticed yet how much we talk about discipleship here at Faith? There is a reason for that. Remember that Jesus defined a disciple as a person who is baptized in faith in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and then enters a process of learning to do *everything he commanded us to do*. His last words on earth made this crystal clear.<sup>11</sup> And he is with us in this. That’s his promise, with us to the end. But he doesn’t just want our lives to include him; he wants our lives to be crammed full of him. What else could he mean by “everything he commanded us to do.” Every room of the house must eventually be renovated. It will take a lifetime at least, but it is meant to begin now. And that’s discipleship at it’s core, learning to live life as Jesus were to live life if Jesus were in my shoes, which in a way, he is!

<sup>8</sup> Read the full sermon at [http://www.loganchristianfellowship.com/uploads/3/8/9/7/38975341/my\\_heart...\\_christs\\_home.pdf](http://www.loganchristianfellowship.com/uploads/3/8/9/7/38975341/my_heart..._christs_home.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:1 declares, “**Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**”

<sup>10</sup> Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey* (IVP Books, 2016), 147.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 28:19-20, “**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”

And honestly, isn't this what you want as well. Let me be transparent with you. I am so tired of the way sin continues to weigh down my life. I know I am loved and forgiven, that the hope of glory in Christ is mine by the grace of Christ. But it's not enough. I want to know the daily freedom of seeing every last part of my rebellious life renovated. There are some patterns and habits in my life that make me so weary of myself.

Can you relate? Things you know that you really want to do, but you either cannot or will not do. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Other things you know you want to stop doing, but you keep on doing them.<sup>12</sup> And then we hear Jesus' beautiful invitation in Matthew 11 and I wonder if this is what he is talking about?

**Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**<sup>13</sup>

He is inviting us to rest, but it is rest through work. A yoke is a symbol of work. You don't put two oxen in a yoke to take a nap. Jesus is telling us here that there is work to do in our lives, much work, the work of total renovation. But this work is not left up to us alone, for there is no way we could ever possibly accomplish it if it were. We are in the yoke with Jesus, and there with Jesus the work, when compared to doing it on our own, becomes easy and light. Don't you long for the life that is promised here? Wouldn't it be worth the sacrifice, to not only have Jesus in your life, but to have your life crammed full of Jesus?

Part of the reason Paul writes all this in the first place is that the church in that day was in danger of being distracted from this main goal of the Christian life. It's no different in our day. In fact, it's not hard to find a church these days where you may never hear a message remotely like this one. You'll hear lots about affecting social and political change in the world. And those are good things. You'll hear lots about going to heaven when you die someday. Also a good thing. Shockingly, however, you'll hear very little if anything about Jesus living in us *now* to transform us that we might live our lives like he would live our lives if he were on shoes.

I have always liked how Dallas Willard puts this priority in perspective at the very end of his book appropriately titled, *Renovation of the Heart*:

Let that be our only aim, and the triumph of God in our individual lives and our times is ensured. The renovation of the heart, putting on the character of Christ, is the unfailing key. It will provide for human life all the blessings that money, talent, education, and good fortune in this world cannot begin to supply, and will strongly anticipate, within this present life, a glorious entry in the full presence of God.<sup>14</sup>

What a tragedy when the church, of all people, becomes distracted by other goals which lead, at best, to temporary and artificial treasure. And so if we don't strive for this main goal as a church, become willing to sacrifice much towards the goal of rearranging everything in our lives towards the purposes of Jesus, then we are wasting our time. And by the way, this life is available to every ordinary Christian. Who does Paul want to present mature in Christ? Everyone! In that one verse, verse 28, he says "everyone" three times to make his point. Don't ever think that this renovated life is only available to the super-spiritual elite among us, for there are no super-spiritual elite. It is God's intention that every ordinary Christian, people like you and me, are meant to eventually have lives that are crammed full of Jesus!

Is the sacrifice worth it? I'm betting my life that it is.

Amen.

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## The Next Step

### *A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application*

1. Read the passage Colossians 1:24-2:5 again. Pay close attention to what you are reading. What do you notice?
2. Paul uses the phrase "Christ in you." He uses that phrase often in his letters. What do you think this means?
3. Let's make it personal. Do you believe the Jesus literally does take up residence in the life of a Christian? Why or why not? How would you know?

<sup>12</sup> See Paul's description of this same struggle in Romans 7:15-20.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>14</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (NavPress, 2002), 251. This is one of the most profound and helpful books I have ever read...and reread!

4. And if having trusted Jesus, he has come to live in you, what do you think he is doing in you right now?
5. What do you think of this idea that the reign of sin in our lives is broken, but the presence of sin still remains?
6. How have you become weary of the burden of sinful habits, perspectives, dynamics of relationships and ways of reacting and responding to the world that you see in yourself? Basically, are you sick and tired of the sin in your life? If so, what do Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30 mean to you?
7. Do you agree that the main emphasis in the church should be the renovation of the human heart, helping people by God's grace to be 'crammed full of Jesus'? If not, what other endeavor should be our focus?
8. Is the sacrifice worth it, the sacrifice of what it will take to turn the whole 'house' of your life over to Jesus and work cooperatively with him to see every square inch of it renovated?

**Table to Table: A Question for kids and adults to answer together.**



*Where does Jesus live in the world today?  
Is it possible that he lives in us?*