**Lessons from a Lockdown**

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**Day 21**

**Colossians 1:24-29**

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. 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.

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

***Questions for Personal Reflection:***

1. What kind of suffering does a Christian go through for the sake of the church? Do I willingly make these sacrifices? Why?
2. What “commission” has God given me? What role does God want me to play in the church? How do I feel about that?
3. What is the “mystery” Paul was talking about? What should we do with this “mystery”?
4. What do the words “proclaim”, “admonish” and “teach” mean?
5. What does “present everyone fully mature in Christ” mean? How do we accomplish this?

***Insight:***

Paul rejoiced in what he suffered for the church. As Christians, there are sacrifices we need to make for our fellow Christians and the church. When a brother or sister is weak or discouraged, we sacrifice our time and resources to help him or her. We sacrifice opportunities to earn money or advance in our careers so that we can spend more time in meetings of the body. We sacrifice our pride when we do not retaliate when we are false accused. We sacrifice our own wants when we contribute money to church. We sacrifice rest and recreation so that we can perform our role in the church. There are many other ways we sacrifice but the question is: Do we rejoice when we sacrifice for the church?

Paul didn’t struggle with sacrificing for the church because he saw himself as its servant. We are servants of God, but we are also servants of the church. How do we feel about this?

The mystery is Jesus Christ. This is a mystery to most people not because it is difficult to understand. It is a mystery because it was previously not made known. But it has been made known to Christians. We need to realize that as Christians we know someone who the world needs to know about. We know who Jesus is and we need to share what we know. Imagine if one group of scientists discovered the cure for Covid-19 and kept it to themselves. They told no one. They kept themselves safe while the people all over the world died. That would be so selfish and evil. But as Christians we have something better than the cure for Covid-19. We have the cure for sin. Not only can Jesus save people from disease, he can save people from hell. What can be better news than that? So when we keep this mystery to ourselves we are worse than those who keep the cure to Covid-19 a secret.

That is why we proclaim him – Jesus. To proclaim is to preach. To admonish is to correct. To teach is to inform or educate. Preaching, discipling and teaching. We need these in our ministries and our churches. Preaching alone is not enough. There must be discipling and teaching. This requires being involved in each other’s lives. This is a challenge if we are quarantined in each of our homes. But if Paul can do it while in prison and without the technology we have, we can do this from our homes.

But what is the content of our preaching, discipling and teaching? Do we talk about Jesus and his teachings or do we focus more on ideas from books, internet articles, inspirational quotes, images, videos, or sound bites? There is nothing wrong with quoting secular sources (Paul did that too) but the meat and substance of our preaching, discipling must be Jesus and his teachings.

Not only must the content of our preaching, discipling and teaching be Jesus, the goal in doing these things must be to help people become like Jesus. The goal is not simply to convict (make people feel bad about themselves) nor is it to entertain (make people feel good). The goal is to present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Finally, the effort we put on preaching, discipling and teaching must go beyond our own abilities. In the NASB, v. 29 says:

For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The Greek word translated as *labor* means to “grow weary, tired, exhausted (with toil or burdens or grief).” Paul preached, discipled and taught to the point of exhaustion. The word translated as *striving* literally means “to compete” and is the word from which the English word *agonize* is derived. We are competing against forces of this world trying to prevent Christians from becoming mature in Christ. We are in a contest for people’s souls and we need to win. We must rely on the strength Jesus provides and not our own. So, we pray, beg God for help and sometimes even fast because we want to rely on God’s energy and not our own.

During the lockdown, let us rely on God as we proclaim, admonish and teach everyone about Jesus so that we all become fully mature in Christ.