

Colossians 1:24-2:5 “No Cowboys”
CCH Sermon Sun 4th October 2020

2v4

- ▲ There's a programme on TV called "Cowboy Builders".
 - I've never seen it but it sounds classic.
 - It's a documentary that seeks to expose rogue builders (cowboys)
 - who have ruined people's lives with bad building work.
 - for example by doing
 - a terrible, unsafe, unfinished garage conversion at extortionate prices.
- But it's not just in the building trade that you get cowboys.
 - It happens in the spiritual world too.
- Rogue pastors, cowboy ministers who v4 deceive by fine sounding arguments.
- And the Colossians who had started so well, were in danger falling prey to their work.
- As David reminded us last week,
 - The Colossians, (living in what we would call modern Turkey)
 - had never met Paul, but they'd heard the good news from their friend Epaphras who brought the good news of Jesus up the valley,
- Well it was the best news they'd ever heard.
 - Forgiveness for sinners,
 - Reconciliation for enemies
 - rescue from darkness into the Kingdom of the Son.
 - A friendship with the King by whom all things were created.
- They turned from sin and trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.
 - And as a result their faith was built on the only and solid foundation there is-
 - the rock of Jesus Christ.
- But on that firm foundation, cowboy spiritual builders were seeking to add.
 - We'll get a few more ideas of exactly what they were adding in a couple of weeks later in chapter 2 with Matt.
 - But in brief, they were suggesting Jesus wasn't enough.
 - It's great you've started with Jesus. But now, try this.
 - Try keystone 2!! Jesus Plus x, y and z.
 - We'll come onto more of that false ministry.
- But in this section today, Paul gives some of the marks of authentic and true ministry.
 - And this is going to be really important for all of us.
 - Because in this world where you can pick your church at the flick of a website or livestream
 - we need to make sure that we don't **choose cowboy builders**.
 - But also we need to make sure that we don't **become cowboy builders**
 - And that's crucial for those of us who help at church
 - in preaching
 - with lifegroups
 - with kids work
 - even just sharing the good news with our friends and neighbours.
 - We want to say the right things.
- No cowboys. That's the message today.
- So let's look at 3 marks of faithful Christian builders in Paul's example.
- And the first is very surprising.

True Christian Ministry 1) INVOLVES HARDSHIP (v24-25)

- v24-25
 - It's hardly a good advert for what you might be looking for from an impressive high-octane spiritual leader.
 - A person who experiences suffering.
- Or is it?
 - Actually, don't you get a little worried by builders who never put their back into it.
 - Those who are on constant tea breaks, or who get others to do all the heavy lifting.
 - Not so for Paul. His ministry involved hardship.
 - You see if we are talking true **CHRISTIAN** ministry, then we might expect it to look like **Christ's** ministry. And that for him (as we saw recently v20) involved making peace through his blood shed on his cross.
- In fact in these verses you can almost see Paul paint a picture of a bottle with all the sufferings needed for the church through history...
 - And though all the saving part of suffering is done by Christ
 - (there's nothing more to add to J's saving work that was finished on Good Friday)
 - there is still suffering work on behalf of Christian ministers.
- Paul calls himself a servant v25.
 - That means putting himself out for others.
 - That means suffering.
 - It means hard work.
- He carries on with this same theme in v29
 - v29 "strenuously contend"
 - One of the words there in the original speaks of physical tiredness /exertion
 - and the other is where we get the word agony from.
 - It's a word that was sometimes used of armed combat!
 - Christian ministry is HARD!
- Now we don't want to be gloomy, as Paul finds joy in his sufferings
 - v24 "I rejoice in what I am suffering".
 - There's actually a joy about following in Christ's footsteps even when they are hard. We all know that when we finish a job for church, exhausted but happy.
 - After all, he's bringing the life saving good news of Jesus.
 - And v29, Paul says that he finds Christ's energy working powerfully in him
 - But there **is** suffering, and that's a mark of True Christian ministry
- For some of you this week it has meant
 - a late night typing out the words for the Lord's Supper services
 - hard work for the leader of a lifegroup zoom call trying to keep conversation going and focused on the passage.
 - for some others another evening given up for a safeguarding kids meeting
 - hours spent recording and editing the Great Sunday Morning Adventure
 - money spent or offered for a friend who's just off the streets at the moment.
 - patience with some teenagers playing another game of Minecraft at Thrive.
- These things aren't much
 - (and a lot less than what some of our brothers and sisters around the world are facing for their faith),
 - nevertheless, there is suffering in true Christian ministry, because we are following Christ in his footsteps.

- TRUE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY INVOLVES SUFFERING.

2) True Christian Ministry PROCLAIMS CHRIST (v25-28)

- OK Paul, you are suffering, you have late nights, early mornings, misunderstandings imprisonments and exhaustion but doing what?
 - How exactly are you serving the church?
- v25. "I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fulness"
- Paul is busy speaking.
 - He's busy speaking the word of God in its fulness.
 - The truth, the WHOLE truth and nothing but the truth.
 - Not with difficult bits left out: money, divorce, hell, turning from sin, sexual purity, the bible's challenges on sexual purity, gossip, materialism, racism.
 - (actually this is why we go for verse by verse bible explanation, so that we don't miss inconvenient or unpopular bits of the Bible out).
- Paul proclaims the word of God in its fulness...
- And v26-27 explains what that message is all about.
 - (Get this, and you've got everything!!!!)
 - Paul proclaims Christ.
- v25-27
- Now you have to understand what a mystery is in Bible language.
- It's not something spooky, something too difficult to put into words (though there is much about God that we can't put into words). It's not something you would find at a Halloween garden centre display or in a whodunnit novel.
- It's an open secret.
- Think more of a blockbuster film trilogy, where everyone is waiting for the final part, and it's now the movie premiere. The secret is out.
- Well here is the mystery.
- And Paul was privileged to be the man in history that got to first pass this on.
- v27
- I have 2 Jewish friends, Bernard- a young man and Peggy-an older lady.
- They came from a Jewish background, and they have both discovered that Jesus is the Messiah. And they've come to put their trust in him.
- Descended from David, Jesus is the Jewish King.
- But here's the mystery. Here's the movie premiere. (Spoiler alert). He's come from the Jewish family tree, but he's not just for the Jewish race. He's for everyone.
 - Africa, Asia, Albania, Australia.
 - Black, White, Rich, Poor, Young, Old.
 - He's for all!
 - We were in a sense alienated for thousands of years,
- but v27. To the church, "God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery".
- And here's the summary of this mystery
- "CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY".
- Anyone can have Jesus in them! Wow!

- Whoever you are, whatever you've done, whatever your ethnicity or background.
- The living Lord Jesus can come and live with you and in you as your personal Lord and Saviour.
- Jesus!
- With you!
 - In Tesco's.
 - In the doctors.
 - In the courtroom.
 - In detention
 - In prison.
 - On a ventilator.
 - Christ in you, the hope of Glory.
- The Creator of the Universe living in you, by his Holy Spirit.
- You may be lonely
- You may be depressed
- You may be anxious about what the future holds.
- But long term, it holds the Hope of Glory.
 - Being with Jesus forever.
 - All as a free gift
 - Not dependent on your work
 - But dependent on Jesus' work on the cross.
- Trust him! Follow him. Ask him into your heart if you have never done it before.
- He promises to come in and be with you and take you to heaven.
 - The creator of the universe
 - The firstborn over all creation
 - The head of the church
 - The preeminent, supreme one,
 - living in you!

What a privilege! And what a message.

- Why would you need to top up the Christian gospel with some high octane additive?
- Why would you need to
- Paul said in another letter, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified".

This 2nd point is a really important reminder for our evangelism. Proclaim Christ.

- This is why we are in Huntingdon.
- Yes we love people in **deed**. But we love them in **word** as well- how could it be loving to give a person a pizza or new furniture and not tell them about Jesus!
- That's hard. It takes guts. It may mean suffering. But don't withhold Jesus from them! No Cowboys please.

This is a really important reminder for our one to one time. Proclaim Christ.

- It's a time of buddying for church. We can get together.... Well talk about Jesus.
- When you visit someone who's grieving. Tell them about Jesus- the one who knew suffering.
- When you visit someone who's hurting. Tell them about Jesus- the friend of sinners.
- When you visit someone who's dying. Tell them about Jesus- the Hope of Glory!

Finally, True Christian Ministry BRINGS MATURITY (v28-2v5)

- Look carefully at v28-29
 - These are precious verses that sum up all the themes of this section.
 - Let's top and tail it.
 - TOP: (Jesus) is the one we proclaim. (2) True xn ministry proclaims Jesus.
 - (admonishing means telling off as well as teaching)
 - BOTTOM: (looked in 1st point) True Christian Ministry involves suffering.
- But look at the middle.
 - So that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. (3)
- Now can I say that this doesn't sound very wonderful.
 - It's not always a compliment when someone is acting very seriously and we say "Oh you're so mature!"
 - Nor do Saga type holidays for the mature customer sound very exciting.
- But actually maturity is something wonderful.
 - For a child to grow up healthy and strong is something that every parent longs for. For them to stand emotionally on their own two feet is really important.
- Maturity in the Christian life is crucial. It saves us getting duped by the cowboys.
- Ollie the Oak Tree wants to grow up tall and strong, able to withstand the pressures of the winds and storms of life, and not get pummelled by any gust in summer or snowball in winter.
- What does he need? He needs Jesus. He needs what he had at the start.
- v28. We proclaim HIM, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.
- It's the teaching about Jesus (point 2) that brings the maturity of point 3.
- Don't listen to the cowboys who say, you started with Jesus, now you need this
 - extraordinary experience
 - this conference
 - this preacher
 - this new discipline
 - this new bible reading regime
 - Fine if those things point you to Jesus.
 - But not if they don't.
 - They are cowboys!
- In the remaining verses Paul shows some of the aspects of maturity.
- We won't have time to look at them all in detail- we will use the Lifegroups in the week to do that in a bit more depth, but let me itemise them. v1-2.
- My goal is that they may be **ENCOURAGED IN HEART** v2.
 - Clear teaching about Jesus, taken to heart brings encouragement!
 - This is one of the aspects of Christian maturity.
 - Don't we all need that during Covid.
 - Life is so discouraging. You don't even know if you can meet your family for half term, let alone Christmas.
 - But you can be in a really hard place, but be encouraged in heart by Jesus.

- **UNITED IN LOVE** v2
 - We use this metaphor in marriage prep
 - The closer a couple, or in fact a church come towards Jesus
 - The closer they are coming to each other.
 - ▲ It's like the spokes of a wheel. As you travel towards the hub, not only do you come closer to the centre, Jesus, you come closer to each other.
 - So husbands and wives, take an evening out to bathe in the wonder of the good news- perhaps going over some of the verses in chapter 1, and you will find greater unity with each other, less snappiness or irritability.
 - And it happens in the church too.
 - We're a small church. There's no-where to hide.
 - Some of us are really annoying.
 - But come to Christ at the centre, and you'll find a new love for people from a different background brothers and sisters who you are united to.
- **BLESSED IN UNDERSTANDING**. v2b-3
 - Paul comes back to the mystery theme.
 - Again the mystery is all about Jesus.
 - In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
 - You don't need an A level or a degree to be wise, you just need to know Jesus.
 - In him is a massive treasure trove (riches, treasure)
 - Why would you ever need to add to him.
 - Just get to know Jesus better in the Bible- you'll have all you need.
- **PROTECTED IN THINKING** v4
 - Here's the cowboy verse we started with.
 - If you keep focused on Jesus, mining all the treasures out of the Bible, (and you'll never get them all out!)
 - ...you will be kept from the cowboys.
 - You will spot false teaching for what it is.
 - Although beware, because false teachers don't come into the church wearing a badge "I am a false teacher"
 - They deceive people by "fine sounding arguments"
 - These arguments are going to be really plausible, very much in line with the spirit of the age, and no doubt with a grain of truth in them.
 - But don't listen to the cowboys.
 - Listening to Christ in the teaching of Paul, and the teaching of the Bible, that will keep you from harm.
- In fact if you keep listening to the proclamation of Jesus in the Bible
- you will be overall **STABILISED IN THE FAITH** v5
 - Paul had never met the Colossians
 - But they'd made a great start and he's delighted by them
 - v5
 - May that be said of each of us at Christ Church Huntingdon.
 - True Christian ministry has grown us to maturity

I hope this passage has given us food for thought.

I hope it has been helpful in showing us what to look for when you look for your next church.

1. A ministry that **involves hardship**, because it's not easy teaching the truth. It's unpopular and the most faithful churches aren't always the most flashy one.
2. A ministry that **proclaims Christ**. Don't settle for a church that just uses the Bible. Settle for a church that teaches the true Christ from the full Scriptures.
3. And as by the Holy Spirit, you take this good nourishment to heart, your Christian life (or your Christian building to go back to the builder analogy) will grow to **maturity**, "rooted strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness".

And if you are not about to look for a new church any time soon, please pray it for our church, and that's what Dan's going to do for us now.