

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Colossians 1:24-2:5 on January 18, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Profile

Today's Focus: Profile—Paul

“Security in Christ Leads to Energy for Christ's Church”

In the name of Jesus who is before all things and in whom all things hold together. Amen.

Friends, today I'm excited because at the end of the service I'm going to introduce you to some special people and a group called the Builders For Christ. You're going to learn about what the Builders for Christ do, what the profile of a builder for Christ looks like, and how you can get involved. If you don't know about the Builders For Christ, basically they're a group of volunteers who are going to come here this summer and help build our ministry center. That's one of the reasons I was gone last weekend. I was gone at a conference where I attended a couple presentations and workshops about the Builders For Christ. They're going to be here in Franklin on site from Memorial Day to Labor Day to work with a lot of energy to help build our new ministry center building.

So at the end of the service I'll be introducing you to Mark who is going to be our project manager from the Builders For Christ. But first today I'm going to introduce you to somebody else, a man named Paul. You might say that Paul was one of the first Builders for Christ because although he never built a physical church building with his hands, at least not the we know of, he worked tirelessly to build up the church of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the words of God.

So stay with me on this today because we're not going to just be learning about Paul, as if here were just some old guy who lived a long time ago. Actually what Paul learned is very relevant to all of us today. You see his story is one of complete transformation. It's about life change. A new identity. A new profile. It's about what can happen when a person comes to fully understand the amazing grace, mercy, and peace of God through Jesus. And here's what happens. **Security leads to energy.** What I want to help you learn to today is that **security in Christ leads to energy for Christ's church.** You might even say that maximum security leads to maximum energy! We continue today in Colossians...

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ *He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.* ²⁹ *To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.*

Friends, I don't know about you but, just being honest, I don't typically say, "I rejoice in what I am suffering." Do you??? Or did that first verse that I read today strike you as a little odd? Paul says, *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you...*

I mean remember what his situation was. At the time of writing this letter to the Colossians, Paul was in Rome, in prison. He wasn't out and about going on missionary trips. Telling people about Jesus is what got him in trouble. He had enemies who wanted him disposed of. His physical body bore the marks of past beatings even. Any of you have old sports injuries, painful reminders that you once endured playing a game? Any of you have some scars from surgery? Well Paul had injuries and scars for preaching and teaching about Jesus. And yet he says, "I rejoice in what I am suffering." What in the world??? How could he say this? Friends, I want you to think about this. What kind of person could say these kinds of things?... *"I rejoice in what I am suffering for you."* -- Only one who is secure in who they are in Christ!

Friends, are you secure in Christ? Or are you secure because of how strong you are, or how successful you are, or how popular you are, or how pretty you are, or how smart or talented you *think* you are? Are you secure because you've carefully crafted your social media profiles to display how happy your life seems, how much fun you appear to have all the time, how lucky everyone would be to have you as an employee or as a friend? Because if that's the case that you either look for or locate your sense of security in any of those things... then you should know that all those things will let you down when they dissolve in the glory of God's presence on the last day and you are left there standing with nowhere to hide.

Paul had to learn this lesson too. Before he knew Jesus as his Savior, if you had asked him, "What makes you work so hard, Paul? What gives you such a strong sense of security in who you are?" he might have said, "Well my outstanding public profile as a Pharisee." Or "My family's prominence." Or, "My religious performance as a Jewish man of high standing." But then he met Jesus who appeared to him in the brightness of the light. Paul got knocked off his high horse. And everything changed. The things that used to make him feel secure came crashing down around as he lay in the dust on the ground. And all his attempts to make a name for himself, all his attempts to make God love him, all his attempts to be happy, to carefully craft his public profile...were exposed in the light of the risen Christ. And only then did Paul find what God always wanted to give him...forgiveness and a brand new identity in Christ.

Paul found maximum security in Jesus Christ when he realized that Jesus was his all-sufficient Savior, that Jesus was his only hope for getting into heaven! This is why Paul was willing to endure what he did preaching the gospel, to suffer what he did to start new churches—because he was secure in Christ. Friends, what does this mean? It means Paul knew for a fact that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, paid for every single one of his sins on the cross. That Jesus perfectly obeyed all God’s commands in his place. That Jesus proved his victory over sin and death when he predicted his resurrection from the dead and then publicly gave evidence to the fact. That all that Jesus accomplished was credited to him, undeservedly so, and he too was a redeemed child of God by grace through holy baptism.

Friends, are you secure? I’ll be honest sometimes what I struggle with is insecurity. Now that might strike you as odd for someone who stands up here and speaks with such conviction. But sometimes outside these walls I allow my security in Christ to get breached too. I’m tempted to care more about what other people think than what God thinks. I’m tempted to crumble when people fire off unfair or unloving criticism instead of finding confidence in who am I in Christ. I’ve even been tempted to quit ministry because I’ve allowed other people’s evaluations or disapproval to impact me more than God’s declarations of approval in Christ. You know what I mean?

And sometime the simple fear of rejection has caused me not to take any risks sharing the gospel with someone who doesn’t know Jesus. Worrying, “What will they think?” has caused me to keep quiet when I know in my heart I should really be speaking up. Trying not to offend everybody has kept me from sometimes speaking the hard truth that I know an individual somebody needs to hear. Because I also have a sinful nature, I can be as insecure about who I am as the rest of you.

But that’s what makes the gospel of Jesus Christ so especially sweet! Friends, if God could love a self-secure man like Paul who once was a persecutor of Christians, chief of sinners, then God can certainly love an insecure pastor and people like you. Remember true security is being secure in Christ! It’s about the fact that Christ was perfect, Christ was sufficient, Christ makes us competent because Jesus Christ lives in us. He gives us the hope of glory. Paul says, ²⁸ *He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.* (To be fully mature in Christ is what I want for all of you. I want you to grow more and more secure in who you are in Christ) ²⁹ *To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.*

Now do you sense a little passion here in Paul’s words? *Strenuously. Contend. Energy. Powerfully. Works.* What’s going on here? Why is Paul getting so worked up? **Because security in Christ leads to energy for Christ’s church!**

Now on the one hand it's not always easy to serve the Lord with energy, is it? Not the least reason is because the devil is not done coming after believers in Christ. That's what Paul was saying at the beginning what he said ²⁴ *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.* He's not saying that there was anything deficient about what Jesus suffered as if we have to somehow add to the sacrifice for sins that Jesus made. Rather he's saying that now the devil's going to try and come after Christ's church—people like Paul, pastors like me, and people like you. This is why it's hard to be a Christian. This is why it's hard to share your faith. It's hard to live according to God's Word without giving into temptation. It's hard to grow to spiritual maturity. And it's impossible to be a Christian without carrying to some extent the cross for his name. But what Paul is saying is this: **Security leads to energy. Security in Christ will produce energy for Christ's church.** The more you and I understand who we are in Christ, the more joy and the more energy we will have to serve Christ's church.

Last week I got to spend a couple days down in Arizona at a Christian leadership conference. In the opening devotion President Mark Zarling from Martin Luther College said something that really resonated with me. He said, "Christian leadership is more about who you are in Christ than what you do for Christ." In other words it's not so much what you *do*. It starts with who you *are*. And who you really are isn't what other people say you are. It's not what other people think you are. It's who you are in Christ—the perfect, sinless Son of God who not only knit you together in your mother's womb but redeemed you from sin and death. You are dearly loved children of God. You are God's holy people baptized into the death and resurrection of an all-sufficient Savior. You are members of the body of Christ, the church. Paul says,

2 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Does it sound like being secure in Christ is a big deal? Absolutely. Just like in Colosse, in our world today there are people all around you who will downplay Jesus Christ to you. They will try and drain your energy for Christ and his church. They don't want your faith or our church to grow. But be encouraged, friends, that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! In Christ you have all that you need! We're just getting started here in Franklin. So stand firm. Be secure in who you are in Christ and I look forward to seeing what God can do with all your energy for Christ's church! Amen.