This morning we are going to talk about what ministry requires.
There are basic requirements to be met, or it isn't actually ministry.
A simple definition of ministry is that it is service to God.
So, ministry is not just something elders and pastors do.
It is something all of us do as followers of Jesus.
But this morning will see what the Bible says ministry requires.
Because not everything that we call ministry may actually be ministry.
I've heard people call things like walking their dog and talking to neighbors their ministry.
Or even churches can start to think everything they do is ministry.
But in this section of Colossians 1:24-2:5, Paul will tell us what ministry should look like.
He is not just describing his ministry, but giving us an example to follow.

I. Ministry requirers suffering (v. 24).

We tend to think of suffering as abnormal.
But the Scriptures tell us suffering should be expected.
This is especially true in ministry.
Following Jesus does not mean everything is good.
Doing work for Jesus does not mean it will be great and successful.
In fact, to follow Jesus and to do work for Jesus means that you will suffer.

Verse 24, ***"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,"***
Look how Paul responds to suffering.
He rejoices!
He is glad to suffer.

And he suffers for the sake of the church.
Serving the church is difficult.
It is hard.
Serving God involves suffering.
We should not except work for God, or in the church to always be great.

In fact, it will often be hard.
It will make us suffer.
And Paul endures this suffering and toil for the sake of the people.
He does it because he loves the church.
And because he knows it is part of serving God.
Suffering is required.

Then Paul says ***"I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"***
It can be hard for us to understand and unpack.
What we need to understand is that somehow our suffering is related to Christ's suffering

We know this passage cannot mean that Christ's suffering was deficient.
It can't mean that Christ's death wasn't good enough for salvation, and Paul is going to help Jesus out.
It must mean something else.
The rest of the phrase is "***for the sake of his body, that is, the church,"***
This is Christ's suffering for His own body, being the church.
This is not talking about salvation, but Christ's mission.
Christ suffered on the cross, but that doesn't mean there is no more suffering ever.
Now, we as believers suffer to continue the work of Christ.
And we continue His sufferings.
But it is not just we do it ourselves.
We are suffering alongside Christ, for the body of Christ,
And this is actually a profound passage.
It means that our suffering is not meaningless.
When we suffer, especially we suffer on behalf of Jesus.
It is a joy.
We, somehow, mystically and spiritually are getting to suffer with Jesus.
We are somehow participating with the sufferings of Christ in Christ.
Our sufferings continue the work that Jesus start and means for us to continue.
This is a hard verse.

You can disagree with this interpretation, but it is how I think we should understand it.
This truth is why the saints are always rejoicing in suffering.
They never complain about persecution.
They never whine or say woe is me.
They are always praising God.
Paul is writing this letter from prison.
And he isn't praying for release.
He is not asking them to start petitions.
He lets them know I am in chains, and I am glad.

We are so lucky to live in our country in the time we do.
Our modern world is built around avoiding suffering.
We find it unimaginable when we are unable to buy fruits out of season.
We get frustrated when a toy we bought from the other side of the world takes more than 2 days to get here.
We can be annoyed when the cell phone that allows us to talk to anyone in the world suddenly is out of service or runs low on batteries.
The world conditions us to think that we should have life without any pain.
That we should expect to only ever experience unending pleasure.

But life is hard.
And hard is good.
Suffering does not mean something has gone wrong.
You cannot get in better shape without suffering through exercise.
You cannot get smarter without mentally suffering through education.
And you cannot become more spiritually healthy without suffering with Christ.

If you are going to serve Jesus, there will be suffering.
Some suffering will come from persecution from outsiders.
Some suffering will come from fellow believers who wrong you.
Some suffering will come from Christ putting you in a difficult situation.
But suffering is a part of what it means to follow Jesus.

And if you are not suffering in following Christ, if it is not hard, then you might not actually be doing ministry for Christ.

II. Ministry requires making God known (v. 25-29).

Ministry is not just about suffering.
It is not just about following Jesus privately.
It is not just about doing good in the community and helping the poor.
Ministry is about making Jesus known.

Verse 25, ***"of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known."***

This is almost as aside.
But ministry is something that we are to steward.
It is not something that we can claim for ourselves.
It is not something that can be applied for or earned through qualifications.
It is something that God Himself gives and bestows.
In the past, Paul thought he was doing a lot of ministry for God when he was killing Christians.
But it was only when God called Him to be an apostle that he was allowed to do true ministry.

Because ministry is a gift.
The word itself doesn't have all these spiritual connotations.
In the Greek it just means assistant.
It is someone works on behalf of someone else who is important.
And it is not given for ourselves.
Ministry is given to us for other people.
God did not give you gifts so that you could be awesome.
God does not give pastors the ability to preach so they can make temples to themselves.
Ministry is meant to serve.
And this is true not just for pastors but for all of us.

The gifts God has given you are not for you.
They are given to you for others.
And this ministry is meant to make God's Word known.
This is what we are all called to do.
Not just those of us who preach.
But every believer is called to this sacred work.
To go and make disciples of all people.

This is what it means to be a Christian.
We are to spend our days and our time helping God be made known.
Helping His word to be understood.
Helping each other to understand it more.
Helping each other to know God more.
Helping those who are not believers to understand what we believe.
Helping others know what the Bible actually teaches.
To help them to understand what it means.

Verse 26, ***"the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints."***
Making Jesus known is an incredible mission.
We have been entrusted with something greater than we imagine.
The mystery that was hidden is Jesus.
It has been the plan of God from the beginning to come in the person of Christ.
We see the glimpses of this all the way back in Genesis 3.
The promise is given that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent.
But they did not know what it meant at that time.
For ages and generations the coming of Jesus was a mystery.
It was hinted about.
It was prophesied.
But it was unclear.
No one knew how it would all come together or what God's plan was until Christ came.

How shameful it is that we are bored by what has been hidden for ages.
Generations of God's people lived and died without knowing a fraction of what you have forgotten and neglected.
Millions of believers would have given anything to sit through sermons you found boring.
There are Old Testament saints who longed and prayed to receive a glimpse of what we tell our children in the back.
The gospel we think of as milk.
The gospel we think we can outgrow.
It is the mystery.
Christ is what was hidden for generation after generation.
And now He has been revealed in all of His fullness.
There is nothing better to spent our time and attention and our affections on.
There is nothing better than Christ.
This is why we should make Him known.

Verse 27, ***"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."***
And it is to us God has made this known.
Our merciful God chose the Gentiles.
We are tempted to think of ourselves as Jews and the Gentiles are others.
But we are the Gentiles.
We are the people who were cast out and far from God.
God has allowed those who were not His people to make Him known.

And the Gentiles get to not just proclaim God.
But we get the riches of the glory.
God has allowed us to get the best portion.
And the riches of the glory is Christ.
Christ came not just for the Jews.
Not just for the religious leaders.
Not just for the healthy and righteous and clean.

He came for the overlooked.
He came fro the meek.
He came for the immigrant, and the refugee, and the foreigners.
He came for the sick, the unclean, the wicked, the blind and the lost.
He came for us.

To us, the mystery has been made known.
And now because Jesus has been made known to us.
Because we have heard the gospel.
Because we have responded to the gospel.
Now, we can in return proclaim the gospel.
We do not just keep it for ourselves.
We want to let everyone know about Jesus.

Verse 28, ***"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."***
And what we proclaim is ultimately Jesus.
We do not teach good morals.
We do not teach principles for good living.
We do not preach about how culture should look.
We do not preach nice ideas.
We preach Christ and Christ crucified.

And part of proclaiming Jesus does involve warning.
The gospel is good news.
Jesus is full of grace.
He is the best thing to happen to the world.
But there is bad news.
Those who reject Jesus will face God's judgment.
They will be held accountable for all of their evil.
People need to be warned this day is coming.

They need to be warned that Jesus is our only hope in life and death.
There is no other path to salvation.

There is no other way to paradise.
There is no other way to true life.
Jesus is primarily wonderful news.
But we should not lie or deceive.
We cannot leave things out.
We have to warn as we proclaim Christ.

But we also are trying to teach with wisdom.
We proclaim Jesus and then teach Jesus.
We do not just tell people to be saved, get them baptized and then move on.
We are not trying to make converts, but disciples.
It is our job and our role to disciple them.
To teach them Jesus.
We proclaim Jesus and then teach what Jesus means.
We teach what following Jesus looks like.
We teach all the things of God.

Verse 29, ***"For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works in me."***
And proclaiming Christ takes work and effort.
But this is what we work towards.
Our goal and our mission is to make Jesus known.
And we do this hard suffering work energized by Christ.

If you put the wrong gas in your car, you will have problems.
Don't try to put in diesel.
Don't try to put in ethanol if you car is not equipped for it.
If you do, you will ruin the engine and the car.
Likewise, we cannot try to do the ministry of Jesus without God's energy.
He is the only one who can empower us to do His work.
You can try and do it on your own, but you will break down.

But when we are filled with the power of the holy Spirit we have the energy we need.
Then God will work powerfully in us.
The work of God will be accomplished.
Jesus Christ has been made known throughout all of the world not because the twelve apostles had a brilliant marketing strategy.
It happened even in the midst of persecution and death because God was working powerfully in them.

And that same God is working powerfully in us.
If we would struggle with His energy.
If we would work for His mission.
If we would work to make Jesus known.
Then we can proclaim Christ.
Is that what you are working towards?
Everything we do should be based on proclaiming Christ.

III. Ministry requires growing (v. 1-5).
This is the goal of ministry.
Anything that we are trying to do for Jesus.
Anything that we as a church are trying to accomplish
It requires that people are actually growing in their faith.
There's lots of good things that churches can do.
There are lots of wonderful things that we can do as believers as a ministry and service to God.
But as a church and as a people for it to be Christ centered, God honoring ministry. It requires that people are growing.

Verse 1, ***"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,"***
We see you again the struggle that Paul is going through.
It is not just a regular struggle. It is a great struggle.

And he is struggling and working and putting in all of this effort and all of this time to help make God known even to people that he hasn't seen face-to-face yet.
OK, all of that work and all of that effort is because he wants them to grow.

Verse 2, ***"That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understand and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,"***
He is doing this because he wants their hearts to be encouraged.
It is not just that he wants them to learn new things about Jesus.
He's not helping only for intellectual growth
This is the hope that their hearts would grow
It is that they would be encouraged yes
But it's really that they would be strengthened and built up

His hope that they are being knit together in love.
What this means plainly is that they as a church would be united.
It is not that they would grow individually on their own.
It is also that they as the body of Christ would become more and more united together.
It is that they would be drawn together.

And they are growing together and being united together in love.
All of us would raise our hands and say that we want to be a part of a church that is united together in love.
Almost all of us would say that we want to be in a community of people who are believers who are not just friends or don't just have things on the surface, but that we have been knit together and stitch together in deep closeness in the love of Jesus
But the scripture seemed to say that this is something that God does to us
We cannot actively knit our ourselves together or force ourselves to grow in this way where to be united in this way.
I can't declare a unity and preach a servant on unity and then expect that we will be united.

It won't just come through the right method or small group structure.
And it doesn't seem to be just for a few, but for the whole church.
We need the power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Jesus Christ of the authority of God, the Father to work and to knit and just bring us together in love.

And as a church if we are growing in our faith, not just individually but corporately this is what God will do to us
Not just a couple people we like, but all of us.
This is not about a method but about Jesus.

He goes on to talk about assurance.
Part of what it means to grow in our faith is that we grow in assurance and understanding.
We get more sure and more secure in Jesus.
And we grow in our knowledge of the mysteries of God.
And really what we grow in ultimately and lastly is Christ
That we grow in terms of Jesus.
What it means to grow we become more confident of Jesus.
That as we grow, we are becoming more rooted in Jesus.
As we grow, we are learning more about Jesus.
As we grow, we are growing deeper into Jesus.
All of our spiritual growth is rooted and flows out of Jesus.

Verse 3, ***"In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."***
It tells us that ultimately it is in Jesus and Jesus alone where all wisdom and all knowledge comes from
There is plenty of street wisdom that you can get.
There is plenty of knowledge of things you can learn from books, many of whom written by people who don't know Jesus
But the treasure of wisdom.
The secret and highest knowledge that we have belonged to find
The secret of the universe.

The wisdom that is hidden from the masses and only a few find is in Jesus. Jesus that is the treasure.
Jesus is the place where we grow and in Jesus it is only where we can find these things.

This is important for us because sometimes as Christians we can think that I need to gain more knowledge and that makes me more holy or I need to gain more wisdom, and that will make me a better Christian.
Well, you need is more of Jesus
Because it is in Jesus that we find true knowledge in Jesus that we find true wisdom in Jesus that we find true faith all of this is in Jesus

Spiritual growth means growing in Jesus.
It is not just learning more about Jesus. It is becoming more like Jesus.
It is being transformed by Jesus
It is imitating Jesus more and more
This is what it means to grow

Verse 4, ***"I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments,"***
There are many who will try to deceive you.
There are many who will try to dilute you
There are many who will try to lead you astray.
They will bring up objections, philosophy, history, all sorts of good logical reasons you should abandon Christ.

But intellectual and logical reasons alone will not keep you from being deceived
Our biggest problem is rarely that we do not know enough. It is usually that we do not know Jesus enough.
Our problem is rarely that we have not learned enough stuff about Jesus.
Our problem is that we have not drawn close enough to Jesus.

Because if you are growing in your faith, if you are growing in closeness with Jesus, if you are growing in knowledge about Jesus and what it means to be with Jesus and seeing Jesus continually in your life, it will not matter what people say
Experience as the riches of his treasury of knowledge, there is no argument somebody could bring that will deceive you even if you don't have an answer why because you have Jesus.
I don't mean there are not answers because there are.
But knowing answers alone will not keep you from deception.

Verse 5, ***"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ."***
Even though he's not there, he's excited
That a spirit is presently with them.
His heart is with them
And Paul says he is rejoicing because of how they were acting
Their churches is in good order it's not disorganized. It's not a mess. They haven't gotten a stray.
They have not descended into chaos like the world around them.
The news were rejoicing because their faith is firm
Their faith is rooted.
They stand firm in Christ because they are growing in Him.

This is what ministry is about.
This is what ministry is about here at our church
We are about growing.
We want to be a spiritual greenhouse.
We want to be a place where people can grow in their faith and we can grow together.
What it means to grow in your faith is not that you learn more stuff.
that we can do that if you think you've learned everything I promise you you haven't come visit me. I've got a couple hundred books you could read, but you see you've only begun to scratch the surface.

Growing in your faith means being firm in Christ.
It means we are going to be more and more sure that our life is going to be centered on Jesus
Jesus is what it means to grow.

Church can do other good things.
We can give a lot we can serve the poor a lot.
We can serve our community.
We can put on events.
We can entertain.
We can learn a lot of good things.
We could start seminary in schools.
All of those things are great,
but none of those things mean anything if we are not growing
None of those mean anything if we are not knitted together in love
They don't mean anything if we are not firm in Jesus

If we want to be at church, then not just me and I just pastor Sheldon, but together the body of Jesus does the ministry of Jesus we need to be willing to suffer and be willing to make Jesus known and requires growing spiritually in our faith.
May we do what God requires.