

The Supremacy of Christ and the Fruit of Gospel Hope
The Book of Colossians
Part 5: Gospel Ministry: Colossians 1:24-2:5

Scripture:

Colossians 1:24-2:5

[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, [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, [26] the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. [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. [28] Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. [29] For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

[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, [2] that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. [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.

Pray

Introduction:

This morning as we continue in our series on the book of Colossians, I want to start by saying that it is our hope, as your elders, that God has been blessing you through these messages. This book is so rich and full of truths about who Christ is, our future or gospel hope in him, and how we are to live in light of that gospel hope. **And the Apostle Paul brings these themes back time and time again, almost in circular fashion.**

He opens in Colossians 1:1-8 by writing to them about their faith in Christ and their future or gospel hope that is laid up in heaven. Then in Colossians 1:9-13 he calls them to live in light of this gospel hope to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God's will so that they will live in a way that pleases him.

In verse 13 he switches back to the gospel by reminding them of what God has done for them through Christ which flows into this beautiful and breathtaking cosmic picture of Christ and his work in verses 15-20.

And then he finishes this section in verses 21-23 by showing us how this cosmic Christ came and rescued lowly sinners like us so that we could be presented to God, as his people, who are holy and blameless.

There is so much beauty and truth that is condensed and packed into these short 23 verses that it **feels like I'm drinking straight powdered Tang without any water.**

And if you don't know what Tang is, it was originally an orange drink that came in powdered form, but if you took a spoonful of the powder and ate it you could hardly keep it in your mouth because it was so jam packed with tart flavor. **I don't know if it is still like that, but that's what it was when I was a kid.**

And the apostle Paul is intentionally writing this way because there are false teachers infiltrating the church who are trying to get the Colossians to put their hope in something besides Christ. They are being persuaded to turn away from the one and only gospel hope of Christ crucified.

But then Paul does something at the end of verse 23 and in our verses for this morning that he doesn't often do. **He connects this gospel hope to a lengthy defense of his ministry.** As he says at the end of verse 23:

"...which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister."

Paul is trying to communicate to the Colossians that this Gospel Hope is not only the truth, but it is the very thing that he has been called by God to proclaim and give his life for.

So, this morning we are going to walk through Paul's description of his call and ministry. And what he will give us in these verses are both the substance of his ministry and the heart that drives his ministry.

Or another way to say it is Paul will give us the **what and why of his calling.**

As we do this, we will see two overarching ideas emerge from this passage:

One, is the reality that Paul is a servant sent by God. His work and teaching are the genuine work of Christ as opposed to the false teachers and teachings, which we will learn about in the coming weeks. **In fact, this point is the main reason that Paul wrote these verses in the first place.**

However, the second thing we will see is a pattern for us as Christians for how we should live in light of this gospel hope that Paul is talking about.

-So today we will walk through these verses by first looking at the what or substance of Paul's ministry in 1:24-29.

-Next we will look at the why or heart of Paul's ministry in 2:1-5.

-Finally, we will close with a call. **How are we being called by Paul and God to live in light of his ministry and the pattern that emerges in and through it?**

So, let's begin by first looking at the what or substance of Paul's ministry.

The What:

Colossians 1:24-29:

[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, [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, [26] the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. [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. [28] Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. [29] For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul starts off the description of his ministry in a very peculiar way. Instead of starting with his call as an apostle or his call to proclaim the message of Christ he starts off by talking about his suffering and God's purpose for it.

He begins by saying that he is suffering for the sake of the Colossians. And that phrase "for your sake," is really important because it actually means that his suffering **is for their good or advantage in Christ.**

But he doesn't stop there. In the second half of verse 24 he takes that same suffering and says that he is not just suffering for the good of the Colossians, but he in fact is suffering for the good and advantage of the entire church. And he is doing this, as he says, "**by filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**"

Now, I realize that probably seems confusing. And you begin to ask yourself, "is Paul saying that Jesus suffering and death on the cross were lacking?" No. In fact Paul says the exact opposite in 2 Corinthians 12:9 when he writes:

[9] But he (God) said to me, "My grace (Which comes through Christ) is sufficient for you (all he needs), for my power is made perfect in weakness."

He also writes later in Colossians 2:9-10:

“[9] For in him the whole fullness (completeness) of deity dwells bodily, [10] and you have been filled (made whole or completed) in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

Paul sees Christ and his finished work as totally sufficient and complete. **It is not lacking anything.**

Instead, what Paul is trying to communicate in Colossians 1:24 is that what is lacking in Christ's afflictions were the future suffering of all who (like Paul) will experience great affliction and hardship for the sake of the gospel.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, was buried, and was resurrected he inaugurated a New Covenant. And when he inaugurated that new covenant, he set in motion a plan. And that plan was to spread his kingdom and church through the proclamation of the gospel and the suffering and persecution of his people.

As Paul writes in Philippians 1:29:

[29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

So then Paul is filling up or fulfilling the sufferings that God in Christ had planned for him so that the church of God, Christ's body, would grow and flourish.

But if we go back to **Colossians 1:24-29** we see that Paul make it clear that this suffering isn't something that he chose for himself. Instead in verse 25 he tells us that he suffers because God made him a **minister or servant** of the church, and he was and is given the **stewardship and responsibility** from God through Christ to **make the word of God fully and completely known.**

But what does it mean for Paul to make the word of God full known? **Now I want you to listen closely to this because later we will see how this applies to all of us.**

In verses 27-28 of Colossians 1 Paul says the following:

What God has called him to make known specifically to this church and to all the gentiles are the rich treasures that come from the reality that **Christ lives in his people and has given each one of us the future hope of glory. We have a forever gospel hope.** This is what Paul means in verse 27 when he writes:

“[27] To them (the saints) God chose to make known (through Paul) how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

But there's more. His call from God which includes suffering for the furthering of the church, isn't just about telling people about the riches of Christ and the future hope that awaits them with Christ. It also includes working, teaching, and warning believers so that they would come to the end of their lives and would be presented to God as mature in their faith.

As he says in the last half of verse 28:

"...that we may present everyone mature in Christ."

This is the ministry that Paul has been given.

He suffers for the good of the church, because he has been called by God to do so as he makes the rich treasures of Christ known, and works to build God's people up to maturity. **(Pause)**

And he is so committed to it that he says in verse 29 that he toils, struggles, and fights with every fiber of his body and spirit as God supplies him the energy to do so.

So if this is **the what** of Paul's ministry then the next question is why.

Why does Paul do this? Now we could very easily just conclude that God has called him to do it and we could leave it at that. But in Colossians 2:1-5 Paul goes out of his way to communicate the heart behind why he does what he does. **Specifically, his heart for the Colossians, his desire for them to fully experience Christ, and his desire to have an overflowing joy in Christ.**

The Why:

Colossians 2:1-5

[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, [2] that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. [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.

Just like in verse 29 Paul uses the language of struggle. But verse 29 was communicating the intensity of Paul's physical work where here he is communicating his heart struggle for these believers and really for all the believers that he has not been able to be physically present with.

He has a yearning, a desire, and really an angst, inside of him because he desires so much good for these believers. **But what is it that he is desiring?**

According to verse 2 his desire is that their hearts **would be encouraged**. Now, this isn't just simply, **"oh I know you're having a hard time, but I hope Jesus makes you feel better."**

No, the language suggests that Paul desires that believers would so have their hearts encouraged in and through Christ that it would affect the very foundations of their personhood (**how they think, feel, and act**).

And as their personhood is encouraged and transformed Paul desires that they would be knit together or united in love. **The idea here is that their hearts would be one in Christ.**

But for what purpose? Are encouragement and unity really the goal in and of themselves? No.

(Slow) Paul desires believers to pursue deep encouragement and unity because he sees them as an integral part of God's people knowing, treasuring, and displaying Christ.

Paul writes in a similar way in Ephesians 4:15-16 when he says: *[15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Do you see it? When believers who are saved by Christ, work together with love, as a body of believers who are joined together, not only build themselves up in love for God and one another, but are able to help one another grow up into the image of Christ.

So that, as Paul writes, in Colossians 2:2-3, we would

"...reach (attain) all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Paul's angst and the whole goal of his ministry is that people, redeemed by Christ, would together, become like Christ and would obtain all the rich blessings and treasures of knowing and experiencing Christ in this life, and that they would be presented mature before him when he returns.

Now in the immediate passage he is telling the Colossians all of this so that they would see and believe the legitimacy of his ministry. That They would see that his ministry and really Christ himself are far greater than any human philosophy and argument, so that they would not stray away from Christ.

But there is one more thing Paul is trying to communicate. He wants to communicate the overarching why of his ministry, which he gives by using one word in both Colossians 1:24 and again in 2:5. The word is "rejoice" in 1:24 or "rejoicing" in 2:5.

All that Paul does in his ministry and all that he desires for God's people he does because he knows that for him and for them that the end goal is two-fold:

First, is an earthly joy that comes from knowing, experiencing, and treasuring Christ in this life. Second, is an eternal joy that comes from the central truth of Paul's ministry: **“Christ lives in us, and he is the future hope of glory, our forever life with him.”**

The overarching why of Paul's ministry is that he works so that he and all believers would have the full joy of a genuine Gospel Hope.

The Call:

This now brings us to the call. How is God, through Paul, calling us to live, in light of what we have learned about his ministry? I believe that the answer to this question becomes clearer as we ask ourselves a series of questions about what Paul has said.

1. Is Paul the only one who is supposed to suffer?

No. As we already saw in Philippians 1:29 all believers will suffer for the sake of or advantage of God's kingdom.

2. Do we have the same calling as Paul? Yes and no.

We are not called to be apostles like Paul, but each one of us has been called to do the work of the ministry.

As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-12: *[11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*

3. Are we called to teach, encourage, and build up other believers in Christ? Yes.

Paul in Colossians 3:16 says: *[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

4. Are we called to have the same singular focus, and heart struggle in our life that Paul had? Yes.

As Paul writes in Philippians 3:13-15: *[13] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [15] Let those of us who are mature think this way...*

Paul lays out his singular focus and struggle and then calls the Philippians and us to the same pursuit.

Therefore, we cannot look at Paul's description of his ministry and say, "**well that was just for Paul, and not me.**" We can't get around this.

This is so important for us to see and understand in our current times, because so many of us are being given over to lesser things beside the grand pursuit of proclaiming Christ, building up the body, encouraging one another, pursuing unity, and with it pursuing the full and joy-filled riches of Christ.

We are given to debating pandemics, masks, racial movements, and we are given to the issues of our day while losing sight of the fact that what matters most is Christ and his kingdom. What matters most is that the body of Christ would reflect and display the beauty of Christ and that the watching world would see a people so loving and so unified and so joy-filled and committed to Christ that they couldn't help but believe in him.

Now, I know I have said this before, but I do believe that the issues facing our country and world are important. But the answers aren't found in political action. The answers aren't found in constant debates over whether or not the democrats are taking our rights away or whether the republicans are just all about big business and don't care about the poor.

Honestly, I believe the answers we so badly need are not found in about 90 percent of the garbage that we consume our minds and hearts with.

The answers we need, our country needs, and the world needs are found solely and squarely in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The one in whom all the real and eternal treasure, hope and joy are found.

So, the call to each one of us today is to stop pursuing what the world pursues. Stop making your life about Netflix, video games, your careers, political action, and about posting your thoughts on the latest social issue.

But instead heed and follow the words of Paul when he writes in Colossians 1:28-29:

"[28] Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. [29] For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Make Christ your central message. Make Christ your central pursuit. Make building up his body your central work and desire. And use all the energy that God gives you to point others to him as their only present and future hope. And, as a result, may you receive the full and everlasting joy that God has planned for you as you give your life to this one and most important pursuit.

Let's Pray.