

Colossians Ch 1 Vs 24-29

The Hope of Glory

Vs24-29

Imagine for a moment going to your mailbox and upon looking at the mail you find that you've received a letter from a man, which you've never met, whom you know to be accused of being a notorious troublemaker who is always upsetting the balance of society, and is currently in prison. How would you respond to such a dilemma? and Yet that's the very predicament that faces the Colossian believers, they knew that Paul had been instrumental in leading their Pastor to Christ, and they knew that Epaphras had gone to Rome to consult with Paul but that he hadn't returned yet. But in the meantime this letter comes to them that's been written by Paul and immediately if not previously these false teachers who have been corrupting them begin to attack the apostle seeking to discredit his message by discrediting him. "Why would you trust the words of a man who's a political prisoner?" "Are you sure you can trust a man who always seems to be stirring up trouble?"

That's one of the ways that people seek to dismantle a mans message, because if you can't find fault with the words themselves (of a man), then what happens is that people seek to destroy the integrity of the man thereby discrediting everything that that man would say. Much the same thing was happening in Galatia, where people were seeking to just destroy Paul's person and if you can't trust a person, or you have question in your heart as to the integrity of a person, then you can't trust the things that that person would say or you question his authority and don't respond to his message. If the person is disqualified, then so are his words, and so the portion of scripture that's before us this morning is Paul's answer to the skeptics. A word to settle the hearts of the Colossian believers as to his authority and stewardship from God, the fact that he was in prison (really) for their sakes, for his willingness to take the gospel to the gentiles.

So in this portion of scripture he diffuses conjecture and skepticism and simultaneously bridges a gap between himself and the Colossian believers causing a certain intimacy that maybe wasn't there previously in just opening up to them concerning this call of God's upon his life and his ministry. and In this portion of Scripture he recites 8 aspects of that ministry, he of the *source* of the ministry, the *spirit* of the ministry, the *suffering* of the ministry, the *scope* of the ministry, the *subject* of the ministry, the *style* of the ministry, the *sum* of the ministry, and the *strength* of the ministry (MacArthur).

Vs 24

The 1st thing that kind of leaps out at us here is the *spirit* of his ministry, and we see here that is was that of joy and rejoicing. He says, “*I now rejoice in my sufferings for you*” those last 3 words there being what I would emphasize, “suffering for you” he wasn’t suffering for his own sake, his suffering was on the behalf of others. and Yet he didn’t gripe about it, he didn’t sit around and sulk over his lot in life and how he’d been given a raw deal, in being in jail for a service that he was doing, not for his own sake but for the sake of others. But rather he rejoiced over the matter, listen, God desires that we serve Him and serve others in His name, but He’ never been miss-leading over the fact that serving Him and serving others in His name can at times involve suffering.

Paul told us that all who desire to live godly will suffer persecution, so if you go through your entire Christian experience and never suffer ridicule, or persecution to some degree or another, then the conclusion is that you must not be living godly. Jesus said, if they persecuted Me, they’re going to persecute you, there’s no servant above his Master. If they desired to crucify your Master, how much more will the world desire to be rid of those who follow Him. In this world you will experience tribulation, these are promises of the word of God. and So knowing that suffering is a part of the deal, there’s no reason to be all, “Oh, man this whole serving things is a hard road, nobody deserves this type of treatment.” Start getting all down on ourselves with the poor me’s and why me’s, the question I’m always confronted with is why *not* me? and Who then should it be *if not* me, am I able to make that call? But the fact of the matter is, is that as believers even in the midst of suffering we can experience joy, (and we’re kind of taking on the spirit and the suffering of the ministry here simultaneously).

But there’s a key that I believe is necessary that you understand as it relates to joy (and we’ve stated before that our joy isn’t to be dictated circumstantially, but it’s granted to us relationally through the person of Jesus Christ). But what’s important to understand is that joy and humility are extremely closely related, in fact you might say that joy is generated through humility. Though our circumstances aren’t to be a factor in our joy, the fact of the matter is, that many people allow their joy to be robbed when they become self-centered thinking they deserve *better* circumstances or treatment than they’re getting. and Really with out putting it in these words what they’re saying is that they’re worthy of better than this.

But with Paul (as well as any of the great men of God) that was never an issue, because he was deeply, and profoundly aware of his own unworthiness, while he was imprisoned in Rome and other preachers were out there getting glory he wrote, “*Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice.*” and He was facing possible martyrdom, execution for the proclamation of the gospel and even still he wrote, “*if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.*” Beaten and imprisoned at Philippi he was singing hymns of praise to God. You see, because he believed that he deserved nothing, there was just no circumstance that could shake him when it came to the joy of the Lord in his life. He was emphatically assured of the fact that God was in control and that nothing would separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

When I was thinking along these lines I was reminded again of Ruth, when she met Boaz and he promised to protect her, and provide for her and bless her life and her response was to fall on her face and bow down to the ground, and she said, “*Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me.*” She was never moved, or shocked, or disheartened, over the tragedies of her life, but absolutely staggered over *any* favor that the Lord would show to her. and I believe that we would do well to allow the Lord to work such a heart into us, a heart of humility, one that’s not taken back when things don’t go the way we think they should, but rather one that is humbled and awe struck that we would ever find favor in His eyes, that He should take notice of us.

Paul walked in humility. Not thinking he deserved better, he knew he deserved nothing, therefore even in what we would consider horrible circumstances his joy just couldn’t be drained, but rather it remained in him throughout his ministry. (Read vs 24 again) Now I must confess this is a very difficult vs (at least I found for me) to wrestle with regarding the intentions of what Paul was saying because on the surface of this vs it does seem to imply that somehow his suffering was completing some lack in the afflictions of Christ. But we can’t forget the principal rule in interpreting scripture that tells us that if we’ve properly interpreted any passage of scripture, it will never violate or contradict any other passage. Paul is saying here that he is increasingly experiencing in his human life here on this earth (fill up in my flesh) what yet needs to occur (or what is lacking) in the afflictions of Christ.

One thing that it would seem emphatically important to make clear is that in no way can he be in regards to the *redemptive* afflictions of Christ, where He was afflicted on the cross for our redemption. Why, well for a # of reasons, contextually he’s just finished explaining the fullness, and the reality of who Christ is and the complete work of reconciliation that was done through Him. #2 and probably the most concise and conclusive answer is because Jesus said, “it is finished” and the rest of the NT only validates the reality of the finished work of the cross. So the redemptive afflictions of Christ simply can not be in view here, nor was this particular word ever used in regards to Christ’s suffering on the cross. and If Jesus said it was finished and Paul was filling up what was lacking, then it becomes obvious that they’re in regards to 2 different things because *there was* nothing lacking in the suffering of Christ on the cross.

But there is an aspect of the afflictions of Christ that *is* lacking (meaning there’s much more of it to be seen or taken part in until the ages are fulfilled) and to understand it simply you could say that it’s suffering for righteousness sake. Receiving in yourself the persecutions and afflictions that are intended for Christ, and when you suffer for Christ’s sake, the fact of the matter is that Christ suffers in you.

You remember when Paul was Saul, and before meeting Christ he was a persecutor of the church, but that day on the Damascus road when Saul of Tarsus met Jesus Christ face to face you recall what Jesus said to him? He said, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me” and Saul said, who are you Lord? and The Lord said to him, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Now Saul had never physically laid a hand on Jesus, but you remember what Jesus said, regarding the poor and down trodden those who were sick and in prison who were believers? He said, “*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*”

Now we tend to take persecution personally, but the fact is, it's not us that people hate, Jesus said, if you were of the world they would love you as their own, but you are not of the world because I've called you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. You remember when the nation of Israel was crying out to Samuel, asking for a king to rule over them and Samuel got all bummed and the Lord said to him, “*Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.*”

So don't be thrown by this one vs and allow it to throw you in your understanding of the redemptive afflictions of Christ, they're not lacking. This is the vs that was isolated and used to sort of spawn the doctrine of purgatory, being able to suffer for your own sins and complete that work so that eventually we could all go to heaven, that's not at all what this vs is saying. and The partaking of the sufferings of Christ isn't a foreign concept to the scriptures anyway, in 2 Cor 1:5 Paul wrote, “*the sufferings of Christ abound in us*” Phil 3:10 Paul writing that he wanted to, “*know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.*” He told the Galatians that he bore in his body the marks of Christ. and This is the same concept we're seeing here, our suffering in the name of Jesus is not helping bring forgiveness of sins to anyone, that was all covered at the cross. But Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

So when you suffer for righteousness sake, you're filling up in your flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, Christ is still being afflicted today through the persecution of His saints, and Paul is saying my suffering is for the sake of His body, which is the church. He was suffering for the benefit for the people of God, and that's why we need to be willing to suffer as well, for the sake of the people of God and those who will become the people of God. How many people have been won to Christ through the witness of a suffering saint who was willing to bless when reviled and patiently endure, we endure suffering for the sake of His body, which is the church.

Vs25

Now this is the source and the scope of his ministry, the source was God, and the scope was to fulfill the word of God, the plan of God for his life personally, he had a specific focus that he was concentrating on. He says here that the stewardship that was given to him came from God, Paul didn't place himself in the ministry; he wasn't looking to be a preacher of the gospel. He was a persecutor of the church who was excelling in many ways above many of his contemporaries and was headed for the upper echelons or heights of Judaism, and you can read his impressive list of credentials in the 3rd ch of Phil. But God had a plan for his life, and so when he wrote to the Galatians he said, "*Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)*" and let it be that whatever capacity that you serve the Lord in, that you can say that you are what you are not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. To the Corinthians he said, I am what I am by the grace of God. and By the grace of God he was made a steward to fulfill the word of God, and the plan of God for his life. Now in 1 Cor 4:2 Paul said, "*it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*" and We could all readily say that Paul was one who was a faithful steward, he told Timothy at the end of his life that he'd finished the race, that he'd fought the good fight and that he'd kept the faith. Question, what has God committed to your trust, and are you being faithful to it as unto Him?

I want you to notice that the things that were committed to Paul weren't for his benefit; God equips us for the sake of others. Paul says that these things that were committed to him was for you, that is the gentiles, Peter was more of an apostle to the Jews, but the gospel for the uncircumcised (that is anyone who wasn't at physical Jew) was committed by and large to Paul. That was the scope of Paul's ministry to fully preach the message of the Word of God to the gentiles, or to understand it another way, to present to the gentiles the Word of God in its fullness, to give us the whole counsel of the Word of God. In Acts 20 vs 20 when he was speaking to the Ephesian elders he said, "*I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house.*" and In vs 27 he said, "*For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*" That which had been committed to him, the understanding of the gospel of the grace of God, he was faithful with to present to them in its fullness. and The primary emphasis of what was involved in preaching to them the full message of the gospel of God's grace was this mystery that we've labeled "the subject of the ministry."

Vs26-27

He preached the message of the mystery, which has been hidden, from ages and from generations that has now been revealed to His saints. and We've made mention several times what a "mystery" in the biblical sense of the word is so I won't dwell on it, but suffice it to say that biblical mysteries can't be know by intuition like a riddle that if pondered on long enough you just might get it. A biblical mystery isn't know through intuition but rather by revelation, when God wills to open the understanding of a man to something that otherwise he could never know, the bible says that the secret things belong to God.

Some things God chooses not to reveal to man, other things He may reveal only to certain people Ps 25:14 says that, “*The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him.*” Prov 3:32 “*The perverse person is an abomination to the LORD, But His secret counsel is with the upright.*” and Then other things were concealed in the OT but God chose to reveal them in the new. and There are several “mysteries” that God revealed in the new covenant but by far this one is the most profound.

The mystery among the Gentiles; that God would bring Jew and Gentile together, breaking down the middle wall of separation and make one body, the church. and Then even further the fact that God would literally dwell in man, Christ in you, the hope of glory. The fact that Jesus would indwell His people just wasn’t made clear in the OT- especially the fact that He would dwell in the Gentiles, so this aspect of the work of Jesus in His people was a mystery that wasn’t revealed until the time of Jesus and the apostles. It was Jesus began to reveal the reality of Him coming to live in us, we read in John 14:20 “*At that day* (that is the day of Pentecost) *you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*” In John 15 Jesus said, “*Abide in Me, and I in you.*” and There are other places that Jesus spoke of His being in us and the apostles taught on the reality of Jesus dwelling in our hearts by faith, and the sad fact is that this is one reality that far to many Christians wake up every morning having forgotten. They remember they have to hurry up and get to work, or get out the door and go to school, they may remember something they forgot to do the day before, but how many of us just take the time to reflect on the fact that Christ lives in us, and He is our hope or assured expectation, and guaranteed certainty of glory. and The bible teaches the mind blowing reality of the fact that as a Christian you are in fact dead, and it is no longer you who live but Christ who lives in you, what manner of life then ought you and I live.

But here’s the glorious part, you and I don’t have to live any certain way, because it’s impossible for me to lead a life that meets the righteous requirements of God. So God sent His Son to die on a cross, that my sin might be forgiven, and 3days later Jesus rose from the dead and then He said I will come and dwell in you and by My dwelling in you, I will give you the power to lead a life that brings glory to God. You don’t have the ability in yourself, but I will dwell in you and I will live in you empowering you to do it, Christianity doesn’t just point you to a path and say there it is that’s the way you need to go good luck, but it’s allowing Jesus to come in you giving you the power and the capacity to do it. It’s not about imitation, it’s impartation—Christ in you. “*The riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

Vs28

If you have a NKJV circle the word “Him” if your bible says “whom” it’s in regards to Jesus Christ It’s Him that needs to be preached, not fanciful stories and entertaining illustrations. Though those things may have their place, it’s Him that needs to be the center focus. Not only to the lost, but to the believer, we need to hear the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified over and over again and sad is the day that you tire of hearing the message of Jesus Christ and the work that He’s done for you on the cross, we need to be reminded. Time forbids us to look them up but write these references down and look them up later and you’ll see the overwhelming emphasis of the apostles preaching Jesus. Acts 3:20, 5:42, 8:5, 8:35, 9:20, 10:36, 11:20, 17:18, in 1 Cor 2:2 Paul said, *“I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”* 2 Cor 4:5 says, *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.”*

Our message isn’t philosophy, it isn’t psychology, it isn’t politics, those things are just distractions, we don’t preach simply precepts or principals, we proclaim a person, the person of Jesus Christ and The “style” of Paul’s ministry, was that of warning and teaching every man in all wisdom. You bible may translate the word “warning” as “admonishing” it’s a word that speaks of “imparting understanding,” “to lay on the mind or the heart.” The stress is on influencing not only the intellect, but also the will and disposition. It describes a basic means of education. (Guzik) MacArthur writes, “It speaks of encouraging counsel in view of sin and coming punishment.” This is the aspect of ministry that most people don’t like, the positive I can go with - the teaching, but the negative warnings have a tendency to make people uncomfortable. Yet both Jesus and the apostles spent a major amount of time warning the people to which they ministered.

But not only is it the responsibility of church leadership to warn the flock of God of sin or danger and the ramifications of certain actions, but in reality it’s all of our duty to admonish one another (and you can refer to 2 Thess 3:14-15, Col 3:16 and Rom 15:14 for a few corollary vs on that). But we’re also to teach one another, imparting positive truths to one another, to stir up and provoke one another to good works. The aspect of warning and teaching one another is the duty of both the church leadership and the body of Christ in general. But it needs to be done with all wisdom, with practical discernment with understanding of the biblical principals in a balanced fashion so as to encourage godly conduct.

Which brings us to the *sum* here real quick of Paul’s ministry, his goal or desired end. (Last ½ of vs28) To bring you into full maturity in Christ Jesus, his purpose in the ministry wasn’t simply to win people to Jesus, it only begins there, if all your time and energies are spent on winning people to Jesus and never bringing the one’s who’ve been won in to full maturity then you’ll have a weak and anemic body, Paul says that it’s his aim to bring believers on into maturity. and The message that brings believers into maturity is Christ in you, the hope of glory- again God help us not to grow weary of hearing the message of Christ, but rather that we would hear the message and grow thereby.

Vs29

The bottom line is ministry that's done right is rarely easy, as a matter of fact it's more often very laborious. This word "striving" is the word from which comes our word to "agonize", again show me your faith with out your works and I'll show you my faith by my works. But Paul is very quick to diffuse any misunderstand by stating the fact that it's His working that's at work in him. All his toil and hard labor would've been pointless apart from the power of God in his life, Christ in *him*. and This is the strength of his ministry, Christ Jesus at work in him and it's important that we're careful to strive according to His working, not our own. So many times I can get caught up doing my own thing and striving to see it through, but those things will burn like chaff. So I invite you this morning to allow the Lord to search your heart, and see what may be there that you're laboring toward that's not His working. and Should He reveal what that is, let it go, keep your focus on His agenda for you life.

If you're here and don't know Jesus at all I'd like to invite you to come to know Him today, the door is open and He's waiting and ready. He laid down His life for you and wants to reveal to you the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, He wants to live in you, and give you the hope of glory.