

# **Colossians 1:24-2:5**

**Date: Sunday, 20 February 2022**

**Scripture: Colossians 1:24-2:5**

**Sermon: Following Paul's Example as He Follows Christ's**

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## **Colossians 1:24-2:5 (ESV)**

Col. 1:24 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.

Col. 2:1 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.

# **Transcript**

## **Introduction**

Back in high school, my worst subject was design and technology. I was terrible at. Even in primary school! But I reflect back and I realise I'm not the best with anything to do with my hands.

We all learn in different ways. There's learning when you listen, learning as you write, learning as you read. There's another one I want to talk about, learning when we watch other people. Learning by example. Watching someone else. And that's what I want to talk about today, because we come to a section of Colossians, where Paul talks about himself and his ministry to the Colossian church.

And I want to suggest that Paul is our example. We can follow Paul's example, as he follows Christ's example. Paul is an example of what it means to follow Jesus. For Paul, his life was about Jesus and about the gospel. And each of us are called to be like that too. So I want to make some observations about Paul's life, and how it can be relevant for us today. Characteristics of our Christian walk. His service, his striving, his suffering.

## **Service**

Let's talk about the first point, his service.

*Col. 1:24 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.*

Colossians 1:24-26 (ESV)

Because in this passage that we read this morning, in fact he refers to himself as a servant. In fact, the word that's used in the English Standard Version, Paul is a minister (verse 23, and verse 25). I think that the word minister is right, but today, we

have this idea that the minister is either someone like me, who is a minister of the church, or a minister, a politician of the country. And that's not how we should understand how Paul is a minister. It's better to understand him to be a servant.

It's an interesting relationship, because he's a servant, he's a servant of God who has called him to preach the word, to make the word fully known. Because he's a servant of God, it means that he is a servant of other people. Often, we see that our vertical relationship, affects and shapes our horizontal relationships. For Paul, he is a servant of other believers. His relationship with God, affects the relationship he has with other people, and that includes the church at Colossae.

I used to fight a fair bit with my brother. Not recently, I tell you, many years ago. Do you believe that? Brothers. But my parents used to tell me that I should love my brother. That it was a way to show my love for them. And I reflect back on that, I think that they were right. A way to show love to my parents, is to show love to my siblings.

Paul puts that into practice, he serves both Jesus and others. One thing that is really incredible is the fact that it's likely that Paul, when he wrote this letter to the Colossian church, is that it is very likely that he never met them in real life. Paul, you see, was imprisoned. Most likely in Rome. It's likely that Epaphras, a member of the Colossian church and who was mentioned in chapter 1 had made a journey to Rome to speak to Paul about the church, and that's why Paul's writing this letter to this church. And yet, even though he has never met this church, he continues to pray for them, he continues to give thanks for them. In fact, in this very passage we're told that he suffers for them. You suffer for someone that you love. That's the strength of his love, the service that he has for the believers here in Colossae.

Now before we think that Paul is one of the religious ones, one of the special ones, one of those who are 'holier' than others, we need to understand that this passage isn't just for Paul. It's for all disciples.

Jesus' call to follow him, to love others. In Matthew 28, just before he ascends back to Heaven, he commands his disciples,

*Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching*

*them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

That command isn't just for his immediate disciples. That command is for all his disciples, in all places, to all peoples, and for all time. Make disciples of all nations. Each of us are called to make disciples. I know, that we use this to talk about missionaries who go overseas. But the call is also for us to make disciples with those who are closest to us.

How are we supposed to do that? Well, Paul shares, doesn't he?

*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.*

Colossians 1:27-28 (ESV)

I want to draw your attention to the main verb that Paul uses here. Three words. Him we proclaim. That's the focus of his service. That's how we serve others. Paul proclaims Jesus. Paul proclaims how Jesus is the hope of glory. How Jesus is the hope laid up in heaven for us. That is who Paul proclaims to those around him. Paul proclaims Jesus by warning everyone against plausible arguments. By warning people about lies that they may believe. Paul proclaims Jesus by teaching everyone. And he teaches them with the goal of making them become more mature in Christ.

In order that we might be presented holy, blameless and without reproach (Colossians 1:22). One of my favourite passages in Scripture in Romans 8:28.

*28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

I suspect that many of us love this verse because it's a truth that we need to hold onto. The fact that no matter what we go through, the good and the bad, the highs

and the lows, God uses it all for his glory and our good. But it can be really easy for us to miss what his purpose is for us. And we're told in the next section,

*29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Romans 8:29 (ESV)

He's changing us so that we might become more like Jesus. That's God's aim. That's Paul's aim in his service, And that's what we aim for when we serve one another. Making them mature in Christ.

We do this by telling others, teaching others about Jesus. Proclaiming Jesus. Help them mature in Christ.

Let me be practical right now then.

For those of us here who have children at home. Our responsibility is to help them know and grow in Jesus. And I want to commend you on what you're already doing. Rachel shows me her instagram, and some of your stories where you're reading the bible with them. I want to commend you on that, I want to commend you on how you're praying with them. It may not seem like much, but these are big things in the kingdom of God. A tiny mustard seed that will grow up to become massive.

If you're married, one of our aims, one of the ways that we can serve our spouse is to help them to become more mature in Christ. For example, Rachel encourages me sometimes when I'm discouraged, she encourages me to look to Jesus. She encourages me to leave my anxieties and my cares at Jesus' feet, knowing that he cares for me and at the proper time he will exalt me. I try, not very well, to read to her the Scriptures just before we go to bed and we discuss it.

It doesn't need to be big. For all of us, we can serve one another by actually finding opportunities to share Jesus. I'll give you one way. We should take the time to listen to another person's story. Help them share their story, and then find opportunities to encourage them, to help them see that Jesus has been with them, that Jesus hasn't forsaken them, that Jesus is there with them in power and presence. It's a way for us to encourage other people's hearts. Helping them to stand firm in faith!

Because that's what Paul does here.

*Col. 2:1 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.*

Colossians 2:1-3 (ESV)

Paul seeks to help his fellow believers to see that they don't need to look for wisdom anywhere except in Jesus Christ. Paul encourages us to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Service.

## **Striving**

Let's talk about striving. But that I mean the struggle that Paul has in serving the church. I mean the strength, and hard work that Paul puts in showing love to his fellow believers.

*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.*

*Col. 2:1 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,*

Colossians 1:28-2:1 (ESV)

I love how hard Paul works in showing love to his fellow believers. We're told that he toils, he struggles. The word that Paul uses for struggle is a word that you might use when you're competing in a game, where you're competing in the Olympics. You work with all your might. It's not some kind of hobby, or side gig. It's something that you devote all your focus, your energy, your time and your resources to compete in. That's the kind of energy that Paul uses in seeking the good of his fellow believers.

The Winter Olympics is on at the moment. I'm not that interested in them. But I was reading a news article about the Russian ice skating team and the amount of hard

work that they go through. It's a lot of pressure for these young skaters. They break down physically, and mentally because of the pressure that they are put under. But competing is hard work, and we mustn't think that the Christian life isn't hard,

Jesus himself says in Luke,

*Luke 13:24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*

Luke 13:24 (ESV)

When Jesus says, strive, it's the same word that Paul uses for struggle. The point is that striving isn't easy. But it's the kind of energy we too are called to have. It's not just for me, but it's for all of us. We struggle, we strive in showing love to one another. Showing love to other people is really hard work. We should expect it to be hard work.

But I also want to pick up on something else, we strive but we strive with the power God gives us. Paul earlier prays that the Colossians might be strengthened with all power. A power that is given to them by God (Colossians 1:11). And it's the same power that he is strengthened by.

It's a partnership between God and Paul. Paul works hard, he struggles, he toils, he strives, because he knows that it is God himself who gives him the strength and the power. I love that image. It's so easy to think that it is our strength, it is our efforts. But really, God is the one who gives you the strength and power.

Jesus himself says,

*5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

John 15:5 (ESV)

Without Jesus, we can do nothing. Unless we have Jesus, all our strength and efforts will count for nothing. So we need to strive, but we do it in the strength of God. We do it with prayer. We need God's strength as we strive.

## **Suffering**

Let's talk about suffering. And it's important for us to talk about suffering because suffering is inevitable. As we seek to serve others, as we strive to do so, we're going to face suffering. And Paul's example of suffering. Because when we read this passage, it should really confront us. The fact that Paul in verse 24, rejoices in his suffering for the sake of the Colossian church.

*Col. 1:24 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,*

Colossians 1:24 (ESV)

We have to talk about suffering because it's par for the course so to speak if we are to follow Jesus. No servant is greater than his master, and so if the master suffers, then the servants too will suffer. And when Paul talks about suffering, it's not just the suffering that we might receive due to other people, but it's the suffering that we might suffer inwardly. The suffering through the long, agonising battle with temptation, or sickness. The suffering that we feel due to anxieties of being a Christian for your family, or for a church. The doubts that buffet us as we seek to trust and obey Jesus. This Christian race that is before us, it is so easy for us to have weight and sin cling to us.

There's been challenges in my life, in my faith. When Rachel has been sick, there have been health issues and doctors can't provide answers. It's difficult. And I'm sure that it's more difficult for her. Perhaps, you know the sorts of suffering I'm talking about, the kind of low grade anxiety, frustrations and disappointments that you experience on a day to day basis.

The fact that Paul rejoices in his suffering is a lesson for us. Suffering is a sign that we are sharing in the same sufferings that Jesus suffered. And suffering is a sign that we are part of God's family. It's a sign that we are following Jesus as his disciples. I hope that can be comforting for you.

But here's something else to encourage you. Something else that is practical.

When Paul talks about suffering and filling up what is lacking in Christ's suffering, I need to explain that to you. When Paul talks about suffering and filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, he's not saying that Christ's death on the cross isn't sufficient for our sin. But the word that Paul uses means making up for someone's

absence. Paul is suffering on behalf of the church, taking on the burden of the church so that the church doesn't suffer.

Because Paul here talks about the fact that he is sharing in suffering for the sake of the church, for the sake of other believers. I wonder whether we can do the same, where we share one another's burdens. Bearing each others burdens. That's really what Paul is referring to here. Taking on other people's suffering. As a church, it's not just Sundays, it's the whole week. And we are to share one another's burdens. It's why I love the Servant song,

*We are pilgrims on a journey*

*We are brothers on the road*

*We are here to help each other*

*Walk the mile and bear the load*

*I will weep when you are weeping*

*When you laugh I'll laugh with you*

*I will share your joy and sorrow*

*Till we've seen this journey through*

Being church is tough. We're all different. We have different backgrounds, we have different histories. It's tough. But it's also rewarding, because we get the privilege of bearing one another's burdens. We get the privilege of sharing our suffering with each other. Like the three legged race you see at schools, we are tied together through Christ. We weep when another weeps. We laugh when another laughs. We share together, we race together, we suffer together.

Service. Striving. Suffering.

Let's pray.