

○ When I was a kid I would have a migraine every Friday or Saturday night. I’m the seventh child of eight, and there were four years to my next older brother. My Mum put my migraines down to stress – trying to keep up with my older siblings and by the end of the week I’d crash. But all I needed was a good sleep, and the next day my migraine was gone. I suffered through those migraines, but learnt that for me, stress and a lack of sleep are the key cause to my suffering. Suffering can have its benefits and taught me that I need a certain amount of sleep.

As we come to our reading today, ○ we note that Paul has begun with praise and thanksgiving, reminding the church at Colossae that Jesus is supreme in all things, and it is for this very reason that Paul labours for the gospel. The central focus of Paul's life was Christ and his Church. Who did Paul live for – Jesus! Who did Paul talk about the most – Jesus! Who was His central focus – Jesus! Jesus was and is incomparable to all others; He has all supremacy – high above all others and worthy to be praised; worthy that we should dedicate our lives to living for Him. He is incomparable when it comes to His being; His creation; His church, and our salvation.

In essence Paul says, “Because of who Jesus is and what He has done for me; He met me on the road to Damascus, and forgave me of my sin; my disdain and disrespect toward Him and my attacks upon his followers. For this reason, I have become Jesus’ servant. (1:23) I suffered with blindness for a few days, and the need to depend upon others – but suffering had its benefits. Those of you living in Colossae might be living in general prosperity; things might be going very well for you, but don’t let yourselves be taken off the track by adding other false teachings or modern philosophies.”

○ He begins in v.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.**” It almost sounds like Paul enjoys being a martyr; being the willing victim ready to suffer for the benefit of others. “I rejoice in what I’m suffering for you.” As though the Lord would look upon him with even greater favour because of the level of suffering he was enduring.

However, Paul is simply being consistent in giving thanks in all circumstances; here he rejoices in his suffering. Although he didn’t start the church at Colossae, nor has he met any of them, he says he rejoices in his suffering for them. Why? Because he understands that our fight is not against flesh and blood; that we live in a fallen world and we suffer for the gospel just as Jesus suffered for us; we take up our cross daily and follow Him. In so doing, Paul is suggesting that they should not be surprised if they too may come into difficult days of suffering.

But he says that he is suffering in the flesh for “**what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions.**” He’s not suggesting that Jesus’ death and suffering was not sufficient, nor that he is now completing what was lacking, but rather that Jesus suffering began the church, and now his suffering along with other Christians results in the continued growth and development of the church. Suffering has its benefits.

This passage is about Paul’s endeavours for the gospel; to see the church grow and develop. He suffers for it; contends for it, labours for it, serves it, and rejoices in it. He rejoices in the church and he rejoices in his suffering for it, because for Paul he had also learnt that the more that we suffer, the more that we know God’s comfort. And the more that we know and experience God’s comfort, the more we are able to comfort others who are suffering.

○ And he outlines this in 2 Cor 1, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.”** We all go through times of suffering and may therefore all comfort one another. Suffering has its benefits.

Alongside this, is the truth that unless we are willing to suffer for the gospel, then the lost and unsaved will never come into faith. ○ Paul says, “I am suffering for the sake of the church.” Can we rejoice because our suffering is seeing the lost saved? Or are we more concerned that we should not suffer at all in this life. We don’t want to experience any physical suffering, nor emotional or psychological, and we carry that over into the spiritual. Let us avoid all suffering if we can – is our mantra.

And one of Satan’s lies is that none of us should suffer today; if He’s a loving God then you shouldn’t suffer. We live in such a wonderful country with great medical services that should enable us through controlled medication that we shouldn’t suffer. Our society tells us that we should live in a tolerant society where our opinion is not only welcomed but respected. We shouldn’t be ridiculed for our opinion – no matter how different it be to someone else’s.

As Christians we are also told to be peacemakers, and thereby we seek to avoid any conflict and resulting suffering. So, we don’t want to rock the boat, and therefore may only ever share the gospel if we know that we will not be attacked or ridiculed. That stance will never sit for Paul – nor Jesus.

Paul rejoices in his suffering because he knows that it is through the times of struggle and suffering that the gospel goes forth into the world and bears fruit. This is why he contends for the faith. ○ V.28 through to v.1, **“He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. 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.”** (1:28 – 2:1)

Our world loves a Superhero – one who can come flying through the air and fix everything. And we look for a Superhero to grow the church. Paul was no Superhero, but strove to work diligently, strenuously, toward the spread of the gospel. Hosanna Wong in her book “How not to save the World” writes, “The battle for people’s lives will not be won in grandiose battles in the sky, with capes flying in the wind, with front-page who’s-stronger-than-who battles and egotistical showboating. The battle for people’s lives will be won on the ground, loving and serving people, many times privately, in our homes, schools, places of work, on our city streets, and in our everyday lives.”

Thankfully it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring growth and development, but He works through us and our efforts. When we are gripped by Christ, as Paul was, we will live for the benefit or well-being of his church, and be prepared to suffer to see that though; we will be prepared to serve people wherever God has placed us.

○ But secondly in this passage, Paul also begins to address the concern that he has that some of them have been misled off the track into other false teachings. There are some who have suggested that there is more to simple faith in Jesus; there are mysteries that they have not yet been privy to, and there are other things that they need to be careful to observe otherwise they may miss being saved. He will go on to address some of these things more specifically but for now he speaks of the only mystery – that they have already come to understand. He says that there are no other treasures of wisdom or knowledge that you need.

He says in v.25 that he is the Lord's servant to the church ○ with the specific task of revealing in v.26, **“the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 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.”** (v.26-27)

Paul, an apostle and evangelist, a Jew given the task of sharing the truth of the Messiah, God's Son, Jesus, given for all people – including the Gentiles. The mystery that had been kept hidden for ages and generations is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” And yes it's a mystery how God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit can be in you. But that God can reside within us had been a mystery for ages past prior to Jesus death and resurrection.

It was also a mystery that God desired to save all people not just the Jews. Prior to Jesus, God was found in the Temple or the tabernacle. Only the Jewish High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies. Now God could be found living in the hearts of people everywhere – those who believe whether Jew or not, male or female, priest or tax collector, slave or free.

In Old Testament times, nobody knew that the Messiah would come and indwell people, and, even more so, they never thought this would happen for the Gentiles. ○ Paul mentions this mystery in five of his writings and says in Ephesians 3:6, **“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”** **“For there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** (Gal 3:28) **“There is no difference - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.”** (Rom 10:12)

As I mentioned, Paul didn't want the believers at Colossae being misled into false teaching; into “special” insights, secrets, or other mysteries. I think that Paul would be appalled if he knew that there are those today who come under, what's called “The Grace Movement” that places Paul on as higher a plane as Jesus, and have created a whole other doctrine on “The Mystery” that Paul alone was privy to. He never desired that anything extra be added to the gospel.

○ He said, **“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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.”** (2-4)

Christ is all we need; within Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that we need. We need no special gifts of prophecy or tongues; or experiences that take us into a state of ecstasy. If God chooses to grant us a special gift or experience – that's His choice, but not to be considered with any sense of pride or status, but to draw us into even greater worship of our wonderful God. And any gifts – all gifts – are to be used for the building up of the body.

When we are gripped by Christ, as Paul was; when we see Christ as all sufficient; all supreme; all worthy; as all we need, then we will live for the blessing of His church, and be prepared to suffer to see His church grow and develop. Suffering brings its blessings. Do you suffer for being a Christian? Are you prepared to suffer because you want to share your faith with others? Are you prepared to serve those people that God brings across your path? May you be encouraged in heart and united in love.