

## 苦中作樂為哪般——歌羅西書 1:24-27

### Reasons to Rejoice in suffering-- Colossians 1:24-27

#### *Introduction, context, outlines*

- **Scripture reading:** Colossians 1:24-2:5; 1 Peter 4:12-19.
- **Context:** Before giving pointed instructions to the Colossian believers, Paul first shows them his heart in 1:24-2:5 to help them understand why he does what he does to serve the Lord, including the writing of this letter.
- **Relevance:** Paul is a servant of God, and by grace we too are saved to serve God. We don't just see Paul's heart here, but we must also **imitate Paul** and let his heart be ours in **serving our Lord**.
- **Main point:** Today's text (1:24-27) **talks about Paul's joy in suffering for serving the Lord**. The sufferings Paul endured far exceed normal people can bear (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). How could Paul be joyful in all these suffering?
- **Outline:**
  - Reasons to rejoice in suffering ?
  - A. To fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (v24)
  - B. To fulfill the ministry of the Word of God (v25)
  - C. To manifest the riches of the hope of glory (vv26-27)

#### **To fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (v24)**

- “filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions”:

**Wrong view :** Jesus' suffering on the cross is not sufficient to pay for all sins of the believer, and part of it still needs to be paid by themselves or by other saints! (This verse has been used to support the Catholic teaching of purgatory and indulgence etc)

**Refute:** The preceding text clearly teaches the total sufficiency of the cross for salvation (v20, 22)! The original Greek word for “affliction” in all its near 50 occurrences in the New Testament never once refers to the suffering of Jesus on the cross for our sins.

**Right view:** “Affliction” is often paralleled with “persecution”, both referring to sufferings endured for one's belief. The persecution of believers is always directed at Christ in reality. This kind of suffering is predestined for each believer by God. There is no lacking in Christ's atoning sacrifice, however, the suffering of Christ appointed by God is not yet completed, and it needs to be filled up by believers (cf Revelation 6:10-11).

**John 7:7**“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. ”

**John 15:18**“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. ”

**Acts 9:4**“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

**1 Peter 4:13**“but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing.....”

**2 Timothy 3:12**“ all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ”

**1 Thessalonians 3:3**“.....disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.”

**Philippians 1:29** “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ”

**Example:** Jack Phillips, a Christian baker in Colorado state, refused to bake a cake for a homosexual wedding and was sued on court by a human right agency which led to a lawsuit that lasted for several years. He did win, but not long afterwards, there came a transgender person who asked him to bake cake with blue on the outside and pink inside, to celebrate the success of his gender change. Jack was sued again and was fined \$500. In reality, it is not him whom the sinners want to persecute, but it is Christ dwelling inside of him.

**Attitude:** “filling up” is a unique word with a prefix that means “*in return, in the place of*”: Paul’s suffering is in the place of, or in return for, Christ’s affliction.

**Ponder:** Christ has taken all the penalty of my sin in my place, and now, in return, I get to bear a little bit of suffering in his place, what an honor!

**Acts 5:41** “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. ”

- “For your sake ... on behalf of His body ... the church ... for your benefit”: Not only to fill up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions, it is also for the benefit of believers in the church—Paul suffers and the church is benefited. The reason is as follows.

## To fulfill the ministry of the Word of God (v25)

- “Of this church I was made a minister”: in v7 Epaphras is called a “servant [or minister] of Christ”, in v23 Paul is a “minister of the gospel” and here he is a “minister of the church.” The word “minister” basically means “one who serves, a servant,” from the verb “to serve”.

**John 12:26** “If anyone **serves Me**, he must follow Me; and where I am, there **My servant** will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” —Therefore, all believers are “ministers of Christ”.

**1 Peter 4:10** “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in **servicing one another** as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ”—All believers must serve the church with their spiritual gifts, therefore, they are all “ministers of the church”.

**2 Corinthians 5:18** “ ...God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry [same root with “minister”] of **reconciliation**,”—This is the gospel ministry known as evangelism, therefore, all believers are “ministers of the gospel”.

- “fully carry out the preaching of the word of God”: literal translation is “fulfill the word of God,” and the verb is the same root as “filling up” in the last verse. Paul’s suffering not only fills up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions, it also **fulfills the work of the gospel for the church!** This expresses Paul’s strong sense of mission as a “minister of the church.”

**Marvel:** God uses us to fulfill His Word?! He created all things by His word (Genesis 1; John 1:1-3), regenerated us by His word (1 Peter 1:23), and now, He uses us to fulfill the work of His Word!

**Theology expansion:** The interaction between God and man. God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, God’s work and man’s participation, are always in perfect harmony. E.g., *Salvation*—entirely God’s sovereign work (Ephesians 2:8-9), but man has the responsibility to repent and believe (Mark 1:15); *sanctification*—entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, but believers must work it out with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13); *Prayer*—God predestined all things, but He also predestined believers’ participation by prayer; here, *expansion of God’s kingdom*—entirely the work of the gospel (Colossians 1:6), however, the gospel accomplishes its work through ministers of the gospel.

**Question:** What is the relationship between suffering and fulfilling the word of God?

**Examples** (in the bible) : Paul and Silas ministered in jail and the jailer got saved (Acts 16) ; Paul proclaimed the gospel with all openness, unhindered, during the two years house arrest in Rome, (Acts 28:31) ; **Philippians 1:12-14, 18**“12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my [i]imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole [j]praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the [k]brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my [l]imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. . . . .What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,”

**Example** (church history) : On January 8, 1956, five missionaries including Jim Elliot, were killed by spears in a malicious attack by native tribes in Ecuador’s forest. Jim’s wife Elizabeth and other coworkers continue to proclaim the gospel to the villagers despite their personal loss. Today after more than 60 years, there is a large group of Christ followers in the tribe, becoming one of the most well-known missionary stories. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” ——Tertullian

**Example** (testimony of a friend): A young social worker went to serve an elderly lady who just went through great sufferings, losing her son and all alone at home. This social worker, not a believer at the time, went to help her, feeling sorry for her pitiful condition. It surprised her to see that the old lady is full of joy. The old lady said that she is not sad because she knows that her son went to heaven and is with the Lord whom he loves. God used this to move the heart of the social worker greatly, and now she is a faithful servant at our church.

**Conclusion** : Suffering fulfills the work of the gospel!

### **To manifest the riches of the hope of glory (vv 26-27)**

- “mystery”: not some mystical knowledge or experience, but that which had been hidden and now revealed. No one understands it before revelation, hence “mystery,” but once revealed, it becomes a revealed mystery.
- “hidden. . . . manifested”: “hidden” is perfect tense, “manifested” is past tense, indicating God has different plans for different eras; “hidden” is to “past ages and generations,” “manifested” is to saints today, showing God has different plans for different groups of people. These contrasts highlight the blessing of believers today—we possess the mystery God specifically manifested to us!

**Theology expension:** God’s revelaton——The only sure and inerrant source of knowledge for mankind. Some things, God will forever conceal (Proverb 25:2) ; Some things, God has revealed to man from the beginning (general revelation, Romans 1:19-20; 2:14-15) ; And others, God will gradually reveal, nobody understands before its manifestation, once manifested, it belongs to God’s people. This last type is the “mystery” in the bible. The entire bible is related to how God gradually reveal His mystery. The core of the mystery is Jesus Christ. (Colossian 2:2) 。

**Deuteronomy 29:29**“ “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.”

- “God willed to make known”: The recipient of the manifestation of the mystery is determined by God’s will. This is God’s election. Other people cannot know the mystery.

**John 6:44** “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;”

- “among the Gentiles”: God manifested the gospel mystery to the Gentiles in particular, which was revolutionary in the cultural background at that time. Jewish people thought being God’s people basically relies on blood heritage, by being Abraham’s descendants.

- “what is the riches of the glory”: An exclamation! This mystery is not dry head knowledge, but riches of glory worthy of all praise. When Paul thinks about the mystery, his heart is filled with glory, riches of glory, and what riches of glory!
- “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”: the content of mystery。 What riches of glory! Holy God, who cannot be tainted by sin, would dwell in believers, even Gentiles, who had no share in God’s kingdom according to old testament law and were treated by the Jews as dirty creatures to be avoided at all cost, yet who are cleansed by Christ’s blood, having now become saints, even holy temples of God, in whom the Holy God Himself takes up His residence and Himself becomes our hope of glory!
- “hope” : eternal perspective, focused on future blessings. Since the life of God came into us, we can directly commune with God without any hindrance, and so our mind is no longer confined to this earthly life, but with assurance awaiting the new heaven and new earth in the future, where we will come with all the saints before Lord Jesus in a perfect resurrected body without sin, with God forever, serving our God joyfully! This is the life testimony for every believer, Christ in us, the hope of glory!

**1 Corinthians 2:9**“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,

And *which* have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”——Christ in you, the hope of glory!

**Connection to the entire passage :** The darker the night of suffering, the brighter the morning light of the glorious mystery. The more fierce the suffering, the more real, more precious, and more manifest the gospel hope in the true believers’ lives. Therefore, Paul can greatly rejoice in his sufferings, knowing God will greatly use them to manifest the glory of gospel!

### *Summary, Application*

- The three reasons for Paul’s joy in his suffering all result from his deep knowledge of God’s will. Look back at Paul’s prayer, he prayed in v9 that the recipients can “be filled with the knowledge of His will”, one of the results of knowing is v11“for the attaining of all steadfastness [endurance] and patience, joyously”. We have seen today that this really is the testimony of Paul’s life. Paul can pray this for the believers because he has found the secret of living a blessed life in the Lord.
- What should you do if you see a huge gap between you and Paul in that you lose your joy all too easily?
  - 1) Study the Bible more, to know God’s will. There is no shortcut you can take on this.
  - 2) Fellowship with brothers/sisters, so that brothers/sisters can remind you of God’s will.
  - 3) Examine your own heart for how much pride there is. Pride is the archenemy of joy. The fundamental reason a believer loses joy is because he thinks he deserves something better.
- Finally, please remember, joy is vitally important for service. If your service is not from a joyful heart, then you’re just forcing yourself to do some duty, which is not worship in spirit and in truth. Service is God’s call for all believers, so we all need to learn to rejoice always by the will of God.