

INTRODUCTION 1

GOD (SCRIPTURE)..... 1

 v.24 – Suffer Joyfully for the Gospel..... 1

 v.25-27 – Serve According to Your Calling 2

 v.28 – Moving People to Maturity 3

 v.29-2:1 – Work Wholeheartedly through Christ 4

 v.2-3 – Enrich the Lives of Others..... 5

 v.4-5 – Strong Faith in Christ 5

YOU (APPLICATION)..... 6

CONCLUSION/COMMUNION 6

Introduction

Well, it's good to be together again. My name's Keith, I'm one of the leaders in this church, and we're currently in a series in which we are going through the book of Colossians together. And last week Brad taught from Colossians chapter 1, verses 15-23 on the supremacy or awesomeness of Jesus; and Brad ended with a challenge for each of us to make sure that Jesus occupies the first place in our lives. So tonight we will be in next section of Colossians (the end of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2), and this passage answers the question, "That if Jesus is supreme in my life, what is my purpose as a believer, what is this journey supposed look like?"

God (scripture)

So, open up you bibles to Colossians 1:24, we'll read through chapter 2 verse 5; if you are using the bible under your chair we will be on the very bottom of page 902. As you're turning there, I wanted to reference that I recently heard a sermon by I guy named Brian Bill from a bible church in Illinois on this passage, and his sermon was very helpful for me, and I'll be borrowing some of it as a framework tonight, so I want to give credit where credit is due.

Now, many believers today are fuzzy about their sense of purpose and how this journey of life is supposed to play out. And in many ways that's understandable, because the journey of life is supposed to look different for different people. There's no cookie-cutter for Christians in terms of purpose, but there are some guidelines, there is a framework. And tonight we'll look at this passage through six different statements or sections that will help us discover what we've been designed to do, and how to go about doing them.

v.24 – Suffer Joyfully for the Gospel

So, starting out in verse 24, Paul, the writer of Colossians, writes "I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church." We see that the first thing in this passage is that we are to suffer joyfully for the Gospel.

Now, there's actually a lot of controversy surrounding this verse in scholarly circles, which I'm not going to dive into, but I do want to point out, maybe remind us from last week, that in Colossians 1:22, we saw that we have been fully reconciled to Jesus through His sufferings, and that Jesus' work on the cross is completely sufficient. Paul wrote a few verses earlier that we are "... [reconciled to God] through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault." This is key, the fact is that through Jesus we have been made holy and blameless and there's nothing left to be done, there's nothing more to add to the equation to secure our salvation, ... but now in **verse 24** we see that there's an expectation that we're to respond to what Jesus has done on our behalf.

Pastor and author John Piper writes that "Christ suffered to accomplish salvation. We suffer to spread salvation." I love that, "Christ suffered to accomplish salvation. We suffer to spread salvation." and **Verse 24** makes it clear that Paul saw suffering as part of the job description of a Christ follower. Paul willingly and joyfully suffered on behalf of others for the sake of the gospel.

Most of us try to get rid of suffering when it comes our way. When we're in pain, we want to relieve it. Paul was different. Christianity is different. Let me do a rapid fire of some verses to help illuminate this, this is just a critical part of our faith:

For example, from the very moment when Paul became a Christian, documented in Acts 9:16, Paul was told that difficulty and suffering was going to be part of following Jesus. Jesus says, in regards to Paul, "...I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

And we see this hold true in the entire New Testament, for example, Acts 5:41 says “The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.” And we also see that this reality of suffering in the NT time holds true, even for us today who follow Jesus

John 15:20 “...Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you...” Another way to say it is that when the gospel is carried to the ends of the earth, it will be accompanied with difficulty. In fact, in order to share the gospel, it’s necessary to share in Christ’s afflictions... it’s just natural.

Suffering is part of following Jesus. Christ followers are recognized by the trials they endure because we follow a suffering Savior. In fact, we are in many ways to expect suffering as Christians; 1 Peter 4:12 says: “Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.”

You see, we know Jesus best when we suffer with Him. Philippians 3:10 says: “I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death,”

In fact, as weird as this sounds, suffering is a privilege if it’s a result of following Jesus, as we see in 1 Peter 4:13: “Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.”

And part of the reason suffering can be a privilege is that suffering produces greater faith and accelerates character development. Romans 5:3-4 states this beautifully by saying: “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.”

Wow.... Look at all those verses... and guys, this is a small sample of the verses showing how we as Christians will suffer for the sake of Christ. How far are you willing to go in suffering for the gospel? Personally, I think that as we get further down the path of planting this church, that suffering and persecution is going to become even more and more common for us, as that’s just the nature of following Jesus. And as Paul wrote in Colossians, as well as clearly seen throughout the entire Bible, this suffering can actually be beneficial as well as an indicator that we are on the right tract.

If I’m honest with you all, just being open here... there have been times already in this church plant that I’ve just wanted to throw in the towel. This church-planting thing has been a hard journey. It’s not been easy. But when I read passages like we’ve just read, I’m reminded that there is no other place I would rather be than here with you all chasing after Jesus, regardless of how hard it is or it gets.

v.25-27 – Serve According to Your Calling

And that leads to the second statement or section from our passage tonight, verses 25-27 where we see Paul basically say that we’re to serve according to our calling. Paul writes God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God’s people. For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory. Part of Paul’s response to the revelation of Jesus being supreme is that Paul considered himself a servant.

Now, Paul’s specific “calling” was to fully proclaim and make known the gospel, the message of Jesus. And this gospel message, according to the passage, used to be a mystery or a secret, but it’s not that way anymore. And this message has a wonderful revelation, which is for those who call Jesus “Lord” and who are God’s people, that Jesus actually lives in us. And we know from the broader NT writings that specifically the Spirit of

God, the Holy Spirit, is the one who lives inside of us. Now that's an amazing thing, and a mystery that is far bigger than my 3lbs of brain can wrap around.

I continue to be amazed at how God would allow me to experience salvation through Christ. I certainly don't deserve it, and neither do you. And here is the key, that when we contemplate the magnitude of this truth, this fact that Christ lives in us, we will engage and respond by serving the church in the same manner that Paul did. And while it will certainly look different for each one of us, serving God and His body, the church, requires that we give sacrificially and serve accordingly....

One of my favorite things as a pastor is to watch believers get fired up to serve in areas that are a perfect match for who God created them to be. There are three areas that I see people serve through, which are their **Time, Talent, & Treasure**...

When I think of people serving through their **time**, I think of how much time Brad must have put in to prepare for last week's message. Or how much time our home group leaders put into pastoring the folks in their groups.

I also love watching people use their God given **talents** and passions for the church. People like Linda and Jessica who are gifted with children and so they are committed to using their talents to help Riverside get our kid's ministry off the ground. Or Benji, who left a paying worship job to volunteer as the main worship leader for our church. And for Jess and the band who are leading us in worship tonight. Or Michelle McCauley who has the gift of administration, so she is volunteering to help get our church data base up and running. Just neat stuff to watch.

I am also so encouraged by so many folks here who are actively using their **treasure** to build the church. Seriously, it's been humbling and so encouraging to see people step up and give sacrificially of their resources to see this church planted, to see restoration in Haiti, to see the world impacted for the kingdom....

On the treasure side of things, one of my favorite verses on giving in the bible is 2 Corinthians 9:7, where Paul writes "**You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.**" Being the start of the new year, I would encourage you to sit down, pray, if you are married discuss with your spouse,... on how you think God is leading you to give this year. It's not natural for us to be open with our treasure, it's not normal for us to want to give more and more, it's real easy to pull back and be territorial with our stuff and with our money, so we need to be intentional about seeking out what God wants us to give, and then to give joyfully.

So, Time, Talent, and Treasure...are you serving according to your calling? If not, flesh out with your home group leader or with a Christian friend or with me what your next step might just be.

v.28 – Moving People to Maturity

And as we serve, we then come to the third statement or purpose from Colossians, which focuses on how, as we serve, how we help other people move to maturity in Christ. Verse 28 states **So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ.**

The Greek text, which is the original language of the Bible, is quite emphatic, which the NLT translation that we use here unfortunately misses. In other words, it's not just "**so we tell others about Jesus...**" it's "**we PROCLAIM Jesus, WE TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS!**" The word "**tell**" in the Greek refers to an official proclamation, like when someone would speak on behalf of the emperor. It meant official business was being spoken and therefore was to be accurate and clear, and delivered with authority. And here is the key to do this.... According to this verse, we are to proclaim Christ, not ourselves, not pop psychology, not political ideology... we proclaim Christ. This is exactly what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:5: "**For we do not preach**

ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.” When we talk to others about our faith, we must always focus on Christ, not on ourselves.

I won't go into it tonight, but it might lead to interesting home group discussions this week; to talk about the difference between “warning” and “teaching” in this verse and how they both should play out in how we evangelize and disciple others. Also **Notice that the word “everyone”** is repeated twice in this verse, meaning that this calling we have to be faithful with the message of the gospel requires us to be broadly sowing seeds, and broadly sharing the message of Jesus.

And I know I harp on this a lot, but that's because it's everywhere throughout the Bible. What is the process seen here in this verse in terms of how we help move people to maturity in Christ? It's evangelism and discipleship. Evangelism and discipleship. **Verse 28 starts** with Paul telling others about Jesus and the gospel message, warning everyone of the critical nature and the response that the gospel message requires. In other words, he's evangelizing, sharing the message of the Gospel.

And then he teaches them how to follow Jesus, with a goal of presenting them to God with a mature relationship to Jesus. This mirrors the Great Commission, or as we call it around here the everyday mission, found in Matthew 28. We looked at this a couple of months ago, where Jesus tells his followers “**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them (in other words, evangelism) ... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**” which is discipleship. And just as the goal in Matthew is to teach others to obey everything Jesus commands, the goal in Colossians is similar, **We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ.** The goal of proclaiming Christ is to help people become complete in Christ. The word “perfect” here in the Greek could also mean “**full grown, or spiritually mature.**”

And this statement is a critical one in terms of making sure we as a church keep things in priority. This verse reminds me that everything we do around here should be done in order to create spiritually mature Christ-followers. Our focus is not on getting more folks to call Riverside home, but on more people following Jesus. We don't want to start a “cool church” or one day “build a church building”; we want to build believers. That's what we are about.

v.29-2:1 – Work Wholeheartedly through Christ

Then, Paul goes on to write in Colossians that if we're serious about moving people to maturity and fullness in Jesus, then we can't be passive, we can't be lazy. Instead, Paul writes in verse 29 **That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me. I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally.**

Folks, look at the commitment Paul had to the body of Christ. How hard did he work? Was it easy work? The word “**struggle**” here comes from the root word in Greek that we translate to “**agony.**” It has the connotation of an athlete or laborer working to the point of exhaustion. Paul used this same word at the end of his life as he reflected on how he had lived in 2 Timothy 4:7: “**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.**”

Folks, I hope you've realized by now that Riverside is not the kind of church that is going to try and fill your time up with meetings and events and programs, ... we not that kind of church that says “**to be committed that you have to be here for 10 hours a week.**” But I hope in communicating the simple vision for our church that you didn't think being a Christian or even a part of Riverside is a walk in the park. While we're not going to try and fill your time with meetings and programs, we **ARE** unashamedly about laying ourselves out, about working and struggling hard to help people move toward full devotion to Christ. I'm humbled by the many people around Riverside who already have that kind of determination. If you're tired and wiped out as you reach out to others, you're in the company of the apostle Paul... and look, I'm not saying be stupid and ignore

the calling to rest and recharge, that's a commandment from God seen in the Sabbath. But man, this is a battle. Planting a church and being a part of the kingdom of God is exciting and hard and a struggle and it requires hard work... there is a lot of heavy lifting to be done.

And there is a HUGE framework or paradigm laid out in the last part of verse 29 that is key, we cannot miss this or our hard work will lead to frustration and burnout... Notice that Paul doesn't just work in his own strength; He instead relies on the power of Christ as he struggles, "**depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me.**"

Christ will provide us with His supernatural strength and explosive energy as we labor to plant this church and advance the kingdom. Do you see the cooperation and combined effort between *[use hands]* Christ and us in this passage? We work real hard, we agonize for others to know Jesus more, and we do this by the power of the Spirit living in us. Which speaks to the key point that we all need to be actively pursuing God on a regular basis. We have to first and foremost be activating the Spirit of God inside of us. I spoke on how to do this last September, September 20th, and would encourage you to maybe go to our website and re-listen to that message as a potential way to help flesh out how to do this, how to have a devotional life that spurs on the power of Jesus within us.

But guys, here's the key, don't hold back. Let's not become spiritually lethargic or lukewarm. Let's go for it and take it up a notch as we plant this church and as we lean on Christ for His strength.

v.2-3 – Enrich the Lives of Others

Now, in our efforts to help people and labor for the church, Paul next clarifies or fleshes out what this involves in verses 2&3 of chapter 2. He writes **I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**"

Paul states that his longing is for believers to **be encouraged**. A DIScouraged individual has lost "courage." When we come alongside, God can use us to pour some courage back in. Paul gave similar instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "**So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.**"

And as we encourage others, we're to do whatever it takes to be "**knit together by strong ties of love**" As members of the Church, we're not to be out of sync or sideways with anyone. In fact, without "**strong ties of love**" in our church, in Riverside, it's really impossible to fulfill the vision in this passage and of our church? You and I can't do this alone. Everyone here (look around)... everyone here needs you, and you need everyone else.

The cool part about the church is that when I need encouragement, it's sitting right here. When you need encouragement, it's sitting right here. This is the reason we are unapologetically crazy excited about home groups, about smaller communities in our church where this "**knit together by strong ties of love**" can fully happen.

And the cool part is that when believers are encouraged and united, they will have the "**complete confidence**"

v.4-5 – Strong Faith in Christ

And the key to this kind of community is that the foundation must always be Jesus. And Paul writes in verse 3 that it's "**In [Jesus]**" that this is possible because the world is going to try and tell us that's it's possible elsewhere, but in reality it's not. That's why Paul continues to write in verse 4&5 **I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments. 5 For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.**"

Folks, the world is constantly trying to tell us that wisdom and knowledge and fullness can be found apart from Jesus. The world will try to deceive us with will-crafted arguments. But the key is that we must remain strong in our faith in Christ. And in the next two weeks as we continue through Colossians chapter 2 we'll flesh out how we go about staying strong in our faith in Christ.

You (application)

So, tonight's passage and message is more of an inventory or an overview of what it means to BE the church. And each of us in the room tonight probably connect with different portions of the text.

(v.1:24) Some of us are comforted by the fact that suffering is a natural part of following Jesus, comforted that you're not alone in suffering, encouraged by the fact that joy can be found in our suffering, and that Christ can use our suffering for His good.

(v.1:25-27) Others might be encouraged and excited to find out what it means for you to serve in the church, maybe you realized what a great privilege and responsibility that is.

(v.1:28) Or maybe you're encouraged again to participate in helping others grow in Christ through evangelism and discipleship.

(v.1:29-2:1) Some of you were probably relieved by the fact that the agony and heavy lifting you're putting in or about to put in to help plant this church puts you in good company, and the fact that our strength to do this comes from the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us... others might have been prompted by the Spirit to dive deeper, to give more, to work harder for the church. And not in an unhealthy way, but in a sacrificial way.

(v.2:2-3) Maybe you were prompted of someone in the church you need to encourage, or prompted to be open and share the fact that you yourself might need some encouragement. That's what it means to be a church of strong ties of love.

(v.2:4-5) And as we ended, it's always good to be reminded that it's in Jesus, not in the ways or the deceptions of this world, that true life is found.

Conclusion/Communion

Seriously, can you imagine if our entire church was actively processing through different aspects of this passage? What an impact on our community and on our world that would make. And, as I said over and over tonight, and I'll say it over and over again for the next 30 years that I plan on being the pastor at this church, Jesus is always and will always be the foundation for all of this neat stuff to happen.

Which is why we come to the communion table on a regular basis. Just as verse 4 stated, the ways of this world are crafty, we're bombarded with well-crafted arguments, ... which is why Jesus said that we're to regularly remember Him through communion. So as the band comes up to continue to lead us in worship, I would invite you to stand as we worship Jesus through communion and song.

Communion is meant to remind us, or help us continually reflect upon Jesus and the cross. Communion...

--SONGS--