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All those trusting in Christ enjoy his presence

Colossians 1:24-29

In the proceeding portions of Colossians 1, Paul has admonished the Colossian church to preserve in the doctrine of the Gospel. As Christians who enjoy freedom of religion and have peace in our lands it is easy for us to ‘yes and amen’ the words of Paul. Yet, this is not the context that the Colossian church is found. The Colossian church is part of an illegal religion within the Roman empire. The founding pastor of the Colossian church, Epaphras, is in prison (Col. 4:12; Phi. 1:23). Those who embrace this Christian faith are oppressed with daily innumerable calamities. Even Paul himself is now living in bonds in consequence of his preaching and professing of the gospel.

You and I might ask, as I am sure the Colossian church asked, “Why should I persevere in the Gospel?” If my Pastor and Apostle are in prison why should I persevere? If there is threat to my family and life why should I persevere? If there is no immediate earthly gain why should I persevere?

The Apostle Paul uses his ministry and experience as an example teaching that he is willing to suffer for the gospel that he might be a partaker in the rich and glorious spiritual blessing of the presence of Christ in his life.

Beloved, we persevere in the faith not for earthly gain, material blessing, or peace in life. No, the privilege of being a Christian is communion with God Almighty. To love and to be loved by Christ. To walk with him daily and to know his presence.

Lesson: All those trusting in Christ enjoy his presence, namely Christ in you.

Our headings are;

1. Christ is present in Paul’s suffering
2. Christ’s presence is the richness of the gospel
3. Christ is present in the church

Point 1: Christ is present in Paul’s suffering (vv.24-25).

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you” (v.24)

Notice especially the words *now* and *suffering*. He does not say I have suffered, or will suffer, but these words are speaking in the present tense. As he writes this letter he is suffering! Experiencing hardships and trials for the sake of the Colossians.

Yet Paul rejoices in his suffering. This is no small claim when we consider what the Apostle Paul suffered for the sake of the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 11:25-28 Paul says, *Three times beaten... Stoned... Shipwrecked & a night and day adrift at sea... danger from rivers, robbers, Jews, Gentiles*, and he concludes by saying... *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*" Paul is boasting, but his boasting is not in his strength or might but in his infirmity (v.30). How is it that the Apostle Paul can boast in his weakness and rejoice in his suffering?

1.1 - Paul rejoices for in suffering for Christ he is identified with the saviour

Paul tells us, *"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ"* (v.24).

Now there are some when they read this say "aha! You see Christ's afflictions saved us but we must also merit some grace for ourselves, Christ must have lacked something that we must attribute to our salvation. But we cannot live with this interpretation, since the Apostle Paul just spent the whole of chapter one providing the sufficiency of Christ! He would nullify all that he has just spoken up to this point.

Rather, we are to understand affliction as pain or harm. Meaning the pain that Satan wants to inflict upon Christ has yet to be completed. Satan violently rages against the Lord Jesus Christ and all who are identified with him but since our Christ is in heaven we experience his wounds. William Hendrickson uses this analogy, it's like an ancient battlefield. Where the king is up on the hill and the army is around him. The enemy draws back their arrow to strike our king but instead hits his soldiers. The arrows, the afflictions, are intended for Christ, but he is in heaven and they strike us instead.

Yet the Apostle Paul counts it as joy to be maimed for Christ. Why does Paul rejoice in suffering?

First, Paul rejoices in suffering for Christ because when Christ was on earth he taught that we would suffer for his cause (Lk. 21:17,19). Consider that when you are spitted for your faith, when Christian are beaten or even killed, they prove the Lord's Word to be true.

Second, our suffering in this life confirms our union with Christ. And if we are united with him in his suffering we will also be united with him in his resurrection power. Paul said in Philippians I count all things as loss... *"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death"* (3.10).

What this means dear church, is that Paul is willing to suffer for the gospel knowing that through his sufferings he is being confirmed in his union, communion, in his future glory, in his present hope, and an everlasting life with God Almighty.

1.2 - Paul rejoices in his suffering for the sake of the body, the church

The second cause of Paul's rejoicing is that his suffering confirms in them the truthfulness of the gospel. Remember that Paul is anticipating the question, "Why should I persevere in the gospel?" They saw their pastor in chains, they saw the persecution of the church, and it caused them to doubt if these Christian doctrines were really true and saving. Thus they were drawn to false religion and deceitful philosophies.

Paul does not seek to minimize his sufferings or hide them from the Colossians or any of the churches in which he ministered. Rather, he points to them as the evidence of the truthfulness of his claims. It is because he endures persecution for the sake of the gospel that the Colossians should persevere. He nor Christ, nor any man would endure these trails and difficulties unless these doctrines were true and saving. For a minister's affliction *is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer* (2 Cor. 1:6).

1.3 - Paul rejoices in his suffering because of his office

Finally Paul says he rejoices in his suffering for the sake of his office. The church is given pastors to present to you the *fullness of the Word of God*. That's the role of a minister.

That's what Paul tells us in verse 25. What office was Paul appointed? "A *servant*" or a *minister*. Who appointed him to this office? "God gave me". To whom is this office regarded "to you" to the Colossian church. What is the purpose of this appointment? "To present to you the *Word of God in its fullness.*" Christ has called Paul to this office.

Application:

1. We must be diligent, in both public and private prayer, to uphold our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. Today the Christian religion is the most persecuted religion on the face of the earth. This day, there are many people who will suffer simply because they love Jesus Christ. They need our prayers.
2. Notice the solution to Paul's suffering for the gospel, he places all his hope and trust upon Christ. "*I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*" (Phil. 3:8). Paul is our example of when mocked, beaten, or oppressed for the sake of Christ to seek our solace in the wounds of the Savior.

Point 2: Christ's presence is the richness of the gospel (vv.26-27).

Throughout church history there has been a frenzy to experience the nearness of God. We know that some would fast for months seeking to experience the nearness of God, others would spend long periods of time in isolation, and even today many will use setting, music, or even other extreme measures to tangibly sense the nearness of God. Yet, these means are unbiblical. Rather, the scriptures teach that the ordinary way that God communicates himself to his people is by Word and the sacraments and we respond to him in prayer.

For some, this is too ordinary, it is not glorious enough! But yet it is through these simple means that God regularly speaks to our souls. To the world the reading and preaching of the Word and administering of the sacraments is foolishness (it's not essential), but to the faithful it is the power of God unto salvation.

2.1 - The Antiquity & Rarity of the gospel

“the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints” (v.26).

I don't believe it is popular to speak of the antiquity (old) and rarity of the gospel message. Yet how else are we to understand the word *mystery*? The Apostle uses in the sense that the gospel was concealed and *hidden* for generations and not made known to the sons of men (the Gentiles) (Eph. 3:3,5,6). In this case Paul uses the word concerning the secret council of God about the salvation of the gentiles. We witness this throughout the Old Testament that in order for a gentile to believe in Jehovah and to worship with the saints they had to become a Jew.

The gospel was also hidden behind the types and shadows of the Old Testament law. All of the Old Testament laws pointed to and foreshadowed the messiah to come but they were vague and difficult to discern. For ages and generations it was concealed only truly understood in the nation of Israel.

Do you know the problem with this dilemma? Due to human sin there is no ingenuity that was ever able to penetrate or gain access to the mystery of human salvation (1 Cor. 2:14). The only way a man or woman could be saved is if the God who concealed it also revealed it. So Paul says it was *manifest* or *revealed* by God to you. Paul is saying that this mystery that could not be comprehended or perceived by the human mind has now been revealed to the Lord's people. Do you see the wonder of what you possess dear Christian? You have not been given something recently in vogue or common but something extremely precious and valuable.

2.2 - The Attributes of the gospel

*“To them God willed to make known what are the **riches** of the **glory** of this mystery among the Gentiles”* (v.27a).

Second, Paul speaks of the attributes of the gospel, he calls this gospel rich and glorious. The gospel is *rich*, in its welcoming in men and women from every tribe, nation, and tongue and has unfolded the treasures of his goodness and grace. Ephesians 2:7 says, *“that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”* God is not poor in kindness and grace but rich in them towards his church. Second, the gospel is glorious. Glorious because it reveals to us the glory of God. In Christ we see God's justice & mercy, anger & grace, his wrath & and love towards sinners. Yet, it is also glorious because it ensures us that we too will be taken into real everlasting glory.

2.3 - The treasure of the gospel

*“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (v.27).*

In this chapter Paul has ministered to the glory Christ as the seraphim minister to the Triune God. Paul does not stop to heap praise upon praise upon praise on Christ. Christ is supreme in the gospel (vv.12-14). Christ is supreme over creation (vv.15-17). Christ is the head of the church (v.18). And he demonstrates the supremacy of Christ in the work of redemption (vv.19-23). Paul keeps lifting Christ up higher and higher. And he does so with the gospel in verse 27. Yet, it is always a danger to the preacher that they lift Christ and his gospel so high that the Lord's people feel distant from him.

The wonder of the gospel that Paul has been explaining is Christ himself, whose indwelling of believers produces the hope of eternal glory. Of all of the spiritual goods that are given to us in the gospel, Christ is the greatest. Because in him is contained all our spiritual blessings. He is love, he is our righteousness, our light, our life, our salvation, and our hope. **(Psalm 73:25, 26, 28)**

Thus, if you have Christ then you are richly blessed and if he is in us then we can be assured of the hope of glory. It is the presence of the savour in our lives that excites us of the hope to come. It is Jesus' presence to which Paul points to as the reason that the Colossian church ought to continue in the faith, which they experience now in part but will experience in full in heaven.

Application:

1. It is very clear to us that not all men are made partakers of these riches; how is it that Christ indwells men and women? The scriptures teach that Christ is said to dwell in any man or woman when the Holy Spirit excites their hearts unto faith and a living trust in God. This person will then believe the doctrines revealed in the Word of God, that Christ is the mediator and redeemer. The man who believes and confesses these things dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in him, and by the operation of his Spirit and of faith, receives all the riches of Christ.
2. Let us not seek ungodly signs of this union that we have in Christ. It is wrong for Christians to seek to induce the presence of Christ by worldly means, rather we experience and know his presence *by faith*. To put it another way, we know that we are Christ's and he is ours by our confession of his Lordship and the agency of the Spirit confirming these things in our hearts by Word and Sacrament.

Point 3: Christ is present in the church (vv.28-29).

Lastly, we see that Christ is to be the principal object in the Christian churches ministry. In these verses Paul reveals the contents of his preaching, the audience of his preaching, and the aim of his preaching.

3.1 - The contents of his preaching

Paul teaches us that what his preaching amounted to, the subject and matter with which he deals, is Christ. *“Him we preach”* (v.28). Christ, the image of God, the head of the church, the source of all fullness, the only mediator and deliverer of mankind, dwelling in you by faith, who ensures you of the hope of eternal glory; this Christ, Paul preached.

In these words Paul differentiates between his ministry and the ministry of the false teachers. Yes, the perched Christ *and* angelic worship, Christ *and* the works of the law. But Christians teach that Christ alone fulfills the office of mediator and redeemer and that faith in Christ, not obedience to the law, is our hope of glory.

Likewise we too are to have sermons that are filled with Christ. Jesus taught that the whole Bible from beginning to end concerned itself with him (Lk. 24:27). Of course, preaching should address issues in our families, churches, and societies but it is not our thesis or our content. For it is only Christ alone that has the power to resolve life’s problems. Charles Spurgeon said, “A sermon without Christ is like a day without the sun, a bread without yeast, a well without water.” In other words, it lacks life. You see, it is Christ that vivifies, renews, and restores us.

3.2 - The audience of his preaching

“warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom” (v.28).

Much could be said here but it is sufficient to note that Paul preached indiscriminately to everyone who would listen. Jew and Gentiles alike received the same gospel message of Christ and his cross. There is one gospel, one message, one way to the Father.

3.3 - The aim of his preaching

“that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (vv.28-29).

The point of Paul’s ministry is to bring all kinds of people to a saving knowledge of Christ. Paul ministered to see European people, African people, Asian people, all people know that Jesus is Lord and for them to be perfect. Yet how can I be perfect? Daily I am assaulted by Satan, the world, and my flesh. Am I not a ruined sinner? When Paul uses the word perfect here he refers to someone being in the possession of all that is necessary for salvation. So how is it that someone becomes perfect? You are perfect, *in Christ Jesus*. That is when we take refuge in

Christ, when by faith we lay hold to his perfections and are renewed by the Holy Spirit into his likeness, and then are you perfect in Christ.

What Paul labours towards is that by the preaching of the gospel he seeks to impress true faith and earnest piety on all men.

Application:

1. It was Jesus who said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit”* (Jn. 15:5). To abide is to live, continue, or remain. Christ beckons you to an intimate and close relationship with him. By this union with Christ there is life and productivity in the Christian life. What is your need? In your walk of faith, what is it that seems to bear no fruit? You are not bidden to pull yourself up by your bootstraps but to come to the living water that refers to the soul. Come to the life giving sap, the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive strength.

Conclusion:

What Paul demonstrates is that the believers' life is not characterized by a dry, boring, in many senses dead faith, but is to be characterized by the life giving presence of Jesus. When we suffer for our faith he is near, he is the treasure and joy of our lives, and the message that we herald. He is given liberally to all by the ordinary means of Word and Sacrament and by simple faith we sense his nearness.