

Wednesdays in the Word
Digging Deeper
November 18, 2020
Colossians 1:23b-29
Continuing Christ's Suffering

The issue of suffering rises before us quite often as we travel through the Word of God. In today's passage and in so many others, we find a common connection to joy in suffering. Why? Reviewing verse 24 we can confer with the following; 1 Peter 4:13, Acts 5:41, Romans 5:2-5, James 1:2. Suffering comes in many forms. Some, as a direct result of the Gospel. Christian persecution, illegal punishment and imprisonment. Hatred and rejection from others including friends and family. Disdain and mockery from the world. When we shine the Light of Christ into the world's darkness it is met with anger, fear and rejection. We also suffer in ways seemingly disconnected from the Gospel. Accident, injury, illness, pain, loss, broken relationships, finances, calamity and disaster. Can these be for Christ's sake as well?

Let's dig a bit deeper into Paul's sufferings. 2 Corinthians 11:18-33. See also Acts starting in chapter 14 and reading on. Paul suffered greatly and repeatedly, mostly for preaching the gospel but many times at the mercy of the weather or the ocean or other of life's hardships. He also struggled with some form of physical infirmity as seen in 2 Corinthians 12:7. Why would such a burdened and rejected man endure all that with joy? In Hebrews 12:2 we see that Christ suffered in the hope of the joy of eternity but can we, ourselves, actually learn to be joyful in sufferings? If so, how?

Back to our text in Colossians 1: 24. Paul explains that he had to continue or 'fill up' the affliction of Christ that came behind or after Jesus' original struggles. He offers the first clue of reason for all this. He does it for Christ's body, the church. Suffering persecution has reason and reward. It is to build, strengthen and support the church. It may not be fun but it is at least rewarding to suffer for the sake and protection of those we love. What mother would not gladly take her child's disease? What Father would not sacrifice his life to defend his family? How, though, can we find any joy in suffering in some seemingly needless way? We all know Godly people who suffered greatly and yet displayed great faith and glorified God in their lives. Missions stories abound in such. A severe accident can lead to sharing Christ with an emergency worker. A horrible disease can bring someone to a Doctor who has rejected Jesus until hearing the Truth from his patient. A natural disaster can bring about an act of mercy from a Christian group who runs to the rescue with physical, emotional and spiritual aid. Financial ruin can bring someone to their knees for the first time to finally turn their life to Christ. A scary surgery can often bring a witness to a hospital roommate. A recovery from such a surgery can bring rejoicing to a prayer group. Each instance of suffering can deliver us to a time, a place and a person who needs Christ or a Christian who needs help and comfort. Each instance of suffering can be a reason to rejoice. Our experiences, be they happy or sad can benefit the church and bring glory to God. Herein lies the reason for joy. Christ can and must be glorified in all we experience. Romans 8:28. All these things will please Jesus and result in blessing the church. In what way are you suffering? How, in that place of pain can you turn it to glorify God? Can you rejoice in this suffering? Yes, but how? We can show faith in God's power to heal. We can thank Him for choosing us to share in His pain for His purpose. We can display the surety of God's provision to others. We can confess of God's past faithfulness, encouraging others to

increase their faith. Our own relationship with God can be strengthened by relying on Him. We can comfort others with the comfort we first received. 2 Corinthians 1:3-6, 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. Every infirmity, discomfort, problem and catastrophe allows us to praise God in some way and to share His gospel with those who surround us. As our faith grows, our ability to find joy in suffering becomes a reality. Basically, we ought to rejoice to be given the privilege to share in His sufferings and we can do so if we understand His purpose.

Paul implies in verse 25 of today's text, that his troubles were set up for him to fulfill. God, in some way planned Paul's agenda and uniquely chose him to take up this calling. Acts chapter 9. The bible gives us many references that our days were ordained for us. We are living out the very lives that He decreed for us. Judges 13:5-7, Psalm 22:9-10, Galatians 1:15-16. The message that was so important to declare, was specifically translated through Paul and inscribed here in Colossians 1:27. "The mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Some religions, both of the Colossians day and of the present, have secret rituals, ceremonies and spoken mantras that Paul, here alludes to when he shares the 'mystery' of the ages. Not a mantra, but an eternal truth, progressively dispensed by God and now brought to light. The Jews were given the responsibility to share God's salvation through their Messiah Yeshua, with the rest of the world. Jesus came for all. John 3:16. Paul now clearly states that this universal Anointed One was intended to not only teach and guide us but to live within us. Hope and glory were meant for all mankind. Paul's plea in today's final verses is clear. Men and women are to be warned, taught and made presentable before Christ. Our directive is also clear. Sharing the gospel of Christ means warning all of the coming Day of the Lord, educating all in the knowledge of His salvation and getting them saved toward the day when all will stand before Him. Hebrews 9:27. Like the Apostle, we are charged with sharing this Good News. We may suffer for doing so but more, even our personal tragedies will permit us to find creative and predestined ways to glorify God and for that we ought to thankfully rejoice. 1 Peter 2:19-25.