

**Christ's Redemptive Work Declared As  
Sufficient  
In Paul's Ministry.**

*Col 1:24 – 29*

**Recap :** Over the 2 sessions we have studied Colossians we have seen that the problem in Colossae was that some false teachers had come into the fellowship and disputed the teaching of Epaphras, seeming to say that the gospel Epaphras had taught the Colossians was insufficient for salvation. This is the same gospel that Paul had taught Epaphras, but now they offered a different or additional gospel based on human traditions, the worship of angels and on legalistic asceticism; promising that thru this gospel one would have deeper fullness, deeper freedom and deeper spirituality.

Paul was now writing to the Colossians and refuting this, teaching them that this was a false teaching that would only lead them astray into deeper confusion and legalism. The main thrust of his teaching in Ch. 1 however, was that Christ redemptive work is complete as is shown by 3 proofs. The was the Colossians own salvation – their testimony of love and fruit was proof of Christ's sufficiency. The second was God's redemptive action thru Christ – that God has appointed Christ as the firstborn over all creation and among the dead, and that Christ is the image of the invisible God. Now Paul comes to his third proof of the sufficiency of Christ – Paul's own ministry.

*Ill – Maasai & Buffalo  
Shoeshine*

Signwriter  
Business counsel

The point is made – the way we live out our lives shows whether we really believe the truths we profess. Col 1:24 – 29 is Paul saying – look at me in front of a buffalo; look at my shoes – I believe and live the very counsel I give you. Christ's work is sufficient and my life and ministry declares it. How?

- By my wiliness to suffer for it
- By my calling & commissioning, &
- By my daily labor and struggle for it

### **1. Paul's Suffering (vs 24)**

What was suffered for you : Our gospel can be called "The Gospel of Suffering" for

- it was promised us in suffering (Gen 3) when God recognized that man had disobeyed; and he was deeply grieved, but also promised a way thru the fruit of the Womb.
- It was prophesied in suffering as Heb 11:36 tells us - Some ". . . were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. . ."
- It was birthed in anguish as our Lord went to the cross and was put to a horrible death on our behalf; but whom "who

*for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame.."*

- The first disciples professed it in suffering and persecution. The story of those first disciples is that the Apostle James was decapitated in Jerusalem in AD 45, Matthew the evangelist was pinned to the ground like a cross, and beheaded in AD 70. Andrew was crucified in AD 70, Thomas was first tortured and then thrown into a furnace with spears sticking out of his body, and Luke was hung from a tree in AD 93.
- Paul himself had faced persecution and danger many times, suffering for the faith, as he professes in II Cor 11 " *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. . . "*

The early church came to understand that "the blood of the saints is the seed of the gospel."

*Recorded in the annals of history are many stories of suffering and persecution. One such story is that of Felicitatis – a well known wealthy Roman lady who, along with her 7 sons, was a devout believer. All 8 were martyred. Januarius, the eldest was scourged, and pressed to death with weights. Felix and Phillip, the next 2 had their brains dashed out with a club. Silcanus, the 4<sup>th</sup>, was thrown over a precipice. The 3 youngest Alexandrer, Vitalis and Martial were beheaded before their mother*

*Felicitatis was also beheaded with the same sword. None recanted their faith!<sup>1</sup>*

The story does not end there for today there are 160,000 martyrs each year for the faith. The documented enslavement of Christians in the Sudan, the Hindu insurgence and the recent martyrdom of a missionary father and his 2 sons in India, or the persecution of believers by Muslims.

What Paul was telling the Colossians was this – I too have been willing to suffer for this gospel. In fact he says "I rejoice!" In the face of such stories of persecution and suffering for the faith, we can hardly count ourselves as having suffered. Jesus prayed for his tormentors, the disciples in Acts 5:40 considered it an honor to suffer for the Name of Christ, and their suffering was because they took hold of every opportunity to proclaim the gospel, as we too would surely suffer if we zealously took the gospel the furthest corners of this land and preached it boldly. And when they were persecuted, they did not pray for the persecution to be stopped, they prayed instead – in Acts 4:29 *Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.* They prayed for greater boldness.

Today we are committed to a Christian life that has no hardship or suffering, even though our gospel is the gospel of suffering. We believe that a sign of blessing is that we do not suffer, face any opposition, and are always received with joy and respect. Suffering is supposedly a sign of the devils curse! And so we are committed to our happiness, whatever the cost or compromise; we resign, we refuse to co-operate, we moan and groan, and we feel betrayed by God at the least sign of trouble

<sup>1</sup> All 3 stories from "The New Foxe's Book Of Martyrs"; Harold Chadwick, Bridge Logos Publishers, 1997, pg 18, 17 & 365 respectively.

or resistance. We seem to be willing to pay nothing, suffer no ill, and face no trouble for the sake of the Gospel. All we want is blessings!

What shame, resistance and persecution has God called you to suffer for his name in your life right now? Do you count it a joy or do you feel saying yes will make God obligated to you for this? Are you willing to bear this cross? And when was the last time you sacrificed anything of worth to God? If like Paul our willingness to sacrifice and suffer for the gospel is a testimony of Christ's sufficiency to a world that is willing to sacrifice and suffer nothing for anyone, then what do they make of your testimony?

In Vs 24, Paul also says that he *'fills up in his flesh what is still lacking in regards to Christ's afflictions'* Could this be an indication that Christ's work was incomplete and insufficient? I think not – what he means here is that the cup of Christ's suffering is not yet full, and will not be so until he returns again. When we suffer, Christ suffers for we are his body. On the road to Damascus, Jesus had asked Paul *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"* For to have persecuted the church was to persecute Christ; and our suffering now, is the suffering of Christ. It is a great privilege to be counted worthy to add even a drop to the cup of Christ's suffering.

## **2. BY HIS COMMISSIONING (Vs 25 – 27)**

But Paul's willingness to suffer was not the only declaration of Christ's sufficiency in his ministry; there was another – his commissioning

### *Ill Bishop John Green of Sydney*

The Jew's and the Gentiles were like that, but the mystery of the gospel is that God has made us all "green!" And the color of the green is called Christian; and there is no light green and dark green – there is only one green – for, as we read in Gal 3:26 – 29

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,<sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

And in Eph 4:4 – 6 *There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called --<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism;<sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

This is the mystery and of Christ – that he has brought potentially warring parties together, and that there is now peace between them. Paul, a Jew of Jews, was now commissioned to be a missionary to the Gentiles. His very commission was a miracle, and several times he had to defend his work, and seek to convince other Jews that it was a legitimate commission.

Have you known this mystery, that breaks down dividing walls and serves as a powerful declaration of the sufficiency of Christ? Living as a people with no borders, no color, no discrimination – living as one family? That as an African you can now fellowship with an believer from the Asian community? That as a Kikuyu you can embrace a brother from the Kalenjin tribe?

*Ill – Kalenjin Pastor who walked out the Kikuyu's from danger.*

### **3. BY HIS LABOR (Vs 28 – 29)**

A third declaring sign of Christ's sufficiency in Paul's ministry was his labor on behalf of the gospel.

- Not only was he willing to suffer for it,
- Not only was he commissioned to proclaim it
- But he was also committed to spending all his energy discipling those who embraced it.

2 words stand out in Vs 28 &29 – the first is the word *labor* – the way Paul uses it, & would have defined it is in the sense of “toiling” – working to the point of exhaustion and collapse.

The second is the word “*struggling*” – a stronger word than labor – it is the same root in the Greek as our English word “agony” – in other words, Paul was expending tremendous amounts of energy; straining every physical and moral sinew to present every man complete in Christ.

The truth is this is the nature of ministry. No great accomplishments are going to be achieved without great labor and struggling. Martin Luther's biographers note that he worked so hard that many days he literally “fell into bed”. John Wesley rode 60 – 70 miles many-a-days, and preached an average of 3 messages a day, whether he was riding or not.

In 10 yrs of pastoral ministry I have come to the conclusion that ministry is sheer hard work, and there are no shortcuts.

*Ill – Peter's surprise at time for sermon preparation.*

And so too it was with Paul – struggling and labouring. So too it was with Jesus In Mk 3:20 we read *Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*

I have often puzzled over this verse, wondering how it is that God is at work within and thru me. Allow me to share a commonly used illustration, but one that makes the point

*Ill – hand in glove*

The glove I give the Lord's hand to fill, is the glove of my hard work and labor, my struggling for the cause of the gospel, my discipline, and study and expansion of energy. This is the glove that the Lord's hand empowers, fills out and accomplishes great things. Without the Lord's hand, the glove can accomplish nothing, but without the glove, then God, who has chosen to work only thru men and women like you and I, cannot empower us with his energy.

*“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works within me”*

In conclusion then, Paul's third proof to the Colossians for the sufficiency of Christ is his own life and ministry.

- His willingness to suffer for this Gospel they had been taught
- His miraculous commissioning to preach to the Gentiles
- His labor and struggle on their behalf

This was proof of the sufficiency of the gospel of Christ.