

## Worth It!

This past Monday, this little guy, Brooks Andrew Anderson, was born to our son, Drew, and his wife, Cass. Cindy and I were out in Colorado to watch their two older kids while Cass and Drew were at the hospital. Of course, as grandparents, we think Brooks is the most beautiful baby in the world.



When you think about a little baby like this and what our son and daughter-in-law hope for him, as well as will seek for him, they hope that he will grow up to be a healthy, thriving, man who does good in this world. They will pray and work to help him grow up to love Jesus and follow Him with all his heart. Starting now and continuing at least over the next 18 years there will a kind of intensity, sacrifice, and flat-out hard work to help him become that kind of person. They will love, teach, train, discipline, and model a kind of life to him. They will give and give of themselves to make this happen. Some of you are right in the middle of this stage of parenting right now! You know what I'm talking about. But here's the thing, any good-hearted parent will have no problem paying such a price because that's what a good parent does. It is their joy to pay this price for the good of their child; to see their child come to maturity. It is worth it!

Today, we are looking Colossians 1:24-29 where Paul describes his ministry. We will see him essentially saying that like a good parent he is willing to pay the price, and to work hard, to help others come to maturity in Christ. He is willing to do this because he believes it is worth it.

In the final verse that Sam preached on last week (1:23), Paul makes the statement that he has been made a minister of the gospel and so with that statement, he begins to describe the ministry to which God has called him. Paul was called as an apostle by the will of God (1:1), and so his ministry was unique in many ways in terms of its scope and authority. And yet, like Paul, we have been called to make disciples of Jesus. And so as Paul describes his ministry here, he models some important things that must be part of how we seek to make disciples whether we are talking about our own children, or people in our Life Group, or people we are mentoring, or whom-ever.

And so let's look at how Paul describes his ministry and see what we can learn. Paul first says that he rejoiced in his suffering for the Colossians.

### I. Rejoice in Suffering (vv. 24-27)

*<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,*

In seeking to establish the gospel among the Gentiles, Paul had suffered. He had suffered a lot. This letter was penned in prison after all. This suffering, Paul says, was for the sake of Christ's

body, *the church*, and since the Colossians are part of the church, his suffering was for them even though he had never met them personally.

Paul says, he was *filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions*. What does this phrase, that commentators call the most difficult phrase in this letter, mean? First, Paul is clearly not saying that there is anything lacking in Christ's redemptive work. The word, *afflictions*, is never used in reference to Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Scripture is clear that Christ's death and resurrection was fully sufficient to accomplish our salvation. Paul will make this clear in chapter two of Colossians (see 2:11-15).

Many commentators argue that what Paul is talking about is something called "messianic woes." It is the idea that at the end of time, before the second coming of the Messiah, there will be a kind of suffering by the corporate body of Christ, which Jesus calls, "birth pains." For instance, in Matthew 24 after describing the wars, and conflict, and famines, and earthquakes that will precede his return, Jesus says this:

*<sup>8</sup>All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. <sup>9</sup>Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.*

To be the people of God is to participate in these birth pains which usher in the kingdom age. The idea that there was a certain amount of suffering that needed to be filled up might come from a Jewish teaching that said that God had established a quota of suffering that would be completed before the end comes.

It is a hard phrase to understand. But what is clear is that Paul suffered for the benefit of the Colossian church. But he didn't complain about the things he suffered for them. No, he *rejoice[d] in his sufferings*. He rejoiced because he knew that his suffering brought about spiritual benefit for the sake of the body of Christ, the church.

In verse 25, Paul continues to talk about his ministry on behalf of the church.

*<sup>25</sup>of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,*

Paul *became a minister*, or servant, of the church. He calls it the *stewardship from God that was given* to him. He didn't choose it. God choose him for this assignment. His stewardship was for them. Specifically, he was called *to make the word of God fully known*. He was to preach the *word of God* that the gospel might spread and be established among the Gentiles.

Verse-by-verse as Paul goes on, he keeps drilling down into the concepts that he is talking about. And so he now goes on to describe *the word of God* that he is seeking to make fully known. In verse 26, He calls it . . .

<sup>26</sup> *the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.*

This is what he is seeking to make known, *the mystery*. In English, “mystery” has the sense of something mysterious, or something we can’t understand, right? In the Scriptures, however, it means something formerly hidden or unknown, but which God has now made known to his people. It is something that is ONLY known because God has *revealed* it. And God has done exactly this; He has *revealed* [it] *to his saints*, which remember means all believers.

Paul uses this term, *mystery*, often. Sometimes it refers to the entire gospel (Rom. 16:25). In other places it refers to some aspect of the gospel (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:51). Here it focuses on the idea that the Gentiles are included in the gospel. We see this in verse 27:

<sup>27</sup> *To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

The basic idea of what Paul is saying here is that it was God sovereign choice to make the mystery, the gospel, known among the Gentiles. Paul specifically calls the mystery, *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. The *mystery* that is now revealed is that Christ dwells within believers, including the Gentiles.

To have Christ dwelling within, means that the Colossians are spiritually rich. Paul loves to use the term, *riches*, to use to describe the blessings that God pours out upon His people through Christ. Think about what it means that Christ dwells within a believer considering what we learned last week in the passage Sam preached on. The One who dwells in us is the image of the invisible God (v. 15), the One by whom all things were created (v. 16), the One who holds all things together (v. 17), the One who is the head of the Church (v. 18), the One who made peace through the blood of the cross (v. 20). This One dwells in us! What riches we have in Christ!

This One who dwells within us, Paul calls *the hope of glory*. Back in 1:5, Paul described this as the *hope laid up for you in heaven*. Because of the indwelling Christ, every believer has the hope of experiencing final glory.

This is the mystery which Paul made known among the Gentiles. And Paul had suffered much to make this message known among the Gentiles. But he didn’t complain. He rejoiced! He believed that his suffering was worth it, because it brought great benefit to others.

What Paul models for us here is a life of caring more about people coming to know Jesus than his own comfort. That he rejoiced in his own suffering because it brought spiritual benefit to others, shows that he wasn’t motivated to protect his own life, or to be comfortable, or to play it safe. His calling was to make Christ known among the Gentiles, and when he saw that happen, even if it meant suffering, he would rejoice.

As I think about this I have to ask myself if I have a willingness to suffer to see the gospel come to people who don’t know Jesus yet? Do you? As we seek to help others come to know Jesus, it

may involve suffering. Probably it won't be the suffering of beatings or imprisonment like Paul endured (although that is a reality for our brothers and sister in Christ around the world) but for us it may be the suffering of being uncomfortable, or being thought strange, or having to give up control of our schedules, or other such things. We are called to make disciples of Jesus and sometimes the work of doing this is hard. Sometimes this requires suffering.

Do we care enough about others' spiritual standing that we are willing to suffer? Do we long for others to find spiritual riches in Christ such that even if we have to suffer for them to find this treasure, that we will rejoice? This is what Paul modeled for us. He suffered. But he rejoiced in his suffering because of what his suffering meant for others. Oh God, give us such concern for others!

Now, as Paul goes on, he talks about the focus of his ministry, which was to present others mature in Christ.

## II. Present Others Mature in Christ (v. 28)

Look at verse 28.

*<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

There is an interesting change in this verse. Throughout this passage, Paul has used the first person singular: "I rejoice;" "My sufferings;" "In my flesh;" "I became a minister." But here he says *we proclaim*. In using the plural, Paul is including his co-workers that he mentions in this letter (4:3, 7-8, 12-13). It is also possible that he means to include all who participate in this mission of proclaiming Christ.

Christ was at the very heart of the message that Paul and his co-workers proclaimed. And Paul says there were two aspects of this. First, proclaiming Christ involved *warning*, or admonishing, *everyone*. This involves warning believers who might be tempted to stray from Christ, or to believe and walk in error. This was certainly important with the false teachers in Colossae seeking to draw people away from Christ. And so they warned the believers. The other aspect of proclaiming Christ involves *teaching*. Paul and his co-workers communicated spiritual truths about Christ. This is exactly what Paul is doing in this letter. All of this, Paul says, they did *with all wisdom*. God was the source of this wisdom. It is a reminder for all of us as we seek to teach others that we need God to guide us and give us wisdom as we proclaim Christ.

Notice that this focus on proclaiming Christ was for everyone. Three times in this passage he uses the term, *everyone*. We warn *everyone*. We teach *everyone*. Why? So that we might present *everyone* mature in Christ. No one is left out. It is possible that in this repeated statement that the scope of their ministry included everyone Paul is confronting the false teachers who advocated a kind of elitism that claimed that salvation was only for certain people.

Paul says that purpose of proclaiming Christ was so *that we may present everyone mature in Christ*. To *present* has the sense of formally presenting something to one who is a superior – like presenting an offering in worship. Paul is probably referring to the end of time and seeing every believer presented before God as mature.

Again, I want to think about what Paul models for us here. First, this ministry of helping others come to maturity in Christ is for everyone. *We proclaim*. Jesus has given the work of making disciples to all of us. This isn't just for pastors, and a few select people in the church. It is for all of us. Who has God uniquely given you an opportunity to influence for Christ? Who has God called you to help mature in Christ?

One of the things we love about Rooted is that it proclaims Christ. It helps us grow in our journey of becoming more mature in Christ. It has been good for my growth in Christ. If you've been pondering doing Rooted this summer, let me encourage you to go for it. And if you want to help someone else grow in maturity, invite them to do it with you.

Secondly, in seeking to help others grow, Paul models that Christ needs to be at the center. Paul doesn't proclaim politics, or religious rituals, or 10 steps to self-improvement. He didn't preach his opinions. He preached the message of Christ. And that is the message we need to focus on as we seek to help others mature in Christ.

Sometimes in our polarized world where there are these cultural battles over this issue or that issue, we can get so focused on and fired up about whatever the issue is that we begin to make that issue the center of what we preach. I'm not saying that such issues are not important, but what I am saying is that our calling is to make disciples of Jesus, and the way we do that is by proclaiming the message of Christ.

I think for me, and probably it is true of many of us, is the reason we easily get off topic is that we are not captivated by Christ. Last week, in the passage Sam preached on, it's the passage that we are reciting often in our worship these days, the beauty, and the supremacy of Christ is revealed. Jesus is the most glorious, beautiful, powerful person. If we could truly comprehend who Christ is, I don't think we would have any problem making Christ the focus of what we proclaim. We will talk about what we love and are captivated by. The core point of Paul's letter is that in Christ we have everything and so let's proclaim Him.

Finally, Paul says that this ministry of seeking to present everyone mature was not something Paul did out of his own strength. Rather, he ministered in Christ's power.

### III. Minister in Christ's Power (v. 29)

Look at verse 29.

*<sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

The thing for which Paul toiled was to present everyone mature in Christ. It is in the present tense, and so the idea is that he continues to labor with sustained effort for this goal. And the way he toils is by *struggling with all his energy*. *Struggling* has the sense of “to contend” or to “engage in conflict.”

Paul works hard at proclaiming Christ. But he also makes it clear that this effort did not arise out of his own abilities. He says he does this *with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*. He ministered in Christ’s power. Jesus, the one who is the sustainer and creator of all things, the one who indwells Paul, strengthened him. Is there human effort here, yes. But it is human effort joined with God’s enabling grace. God *powerfully* worked in Paul to sustain him in his ministry.

As we think about helping others come to know Jesus and to become spiritually mature, we need to remember that this is spiritual work. God uses us for sure! That’s what Paul is saying in this whole section about his ministry. And it is something at which we should work hard. But it should be hard work that flows from God’s enabling grace. We can trust him to give us everything we need as we seek to influence others. We can trust God to enable us to help bring others to maturity in Christ. We are to minister in Christ’s power.

Rejoice in suffering, knowing that others receive spiritual benefit. Seek to present others mature in Christ. And do so by ministering in Christ’s power. This is what Paul models for us.

I started off talking about the task before Drew and Cass to help our grandson, Brooks, grow up into a follower of Christ, and to a mature man who does good in this world. I talked about the hard work and the sacrifices that Drew and Cass will have to make to help him and their other kids, Beau and Margo, arrive at that. They’ve got a lot of hard work in front of them.

Cindy and I are on the other side of the hard work of parenting. We have four kids and so with the almost ten years between the oldest and youngest, we had almost 30 years with at least one of our kids in the home. We had a lot of fun with our kids, but it was hard work. But you know what, now as we see our four kids and how they are doing, it was worth it! Every bit of sacrifice and hard work was worth it!

And the same is true as we seek to help others come to know Jesus and then come to maturity in Him. It is hard work. Sometimes it will require suffering. But as we seek to help others come to maturity and to do so in the power of the Spirit, God will use us. And God will change lives. We will never regret investing in others. It is worth it!