

The Cost of Mission

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[0 : 00] Colossians chapter 1, if you're new here, haven't been around in a while, we're going through a series in the book of Colossians. That's generally our habit is to go through one book at a time. One thing it helps us to do is to avoid me preaching on what I think everyone needs to hear.

And it's a way of saying, I'm going to submit myself to the scriptures and hopefully let the Lord speak to us what's on his mind. So before we read, I want to take you back a few years to 1940.

Winston Churchill had just been elected into the parliament. You know, Winston Churchill, he was the great leader of the British government during World War II. Right after he was elected, it's 1940, you've got the Nazis on the doorstep of England.

And in his first speech to parliament, he gives one of the most famous speeches that that parliament had ever heard. And I want to read just one paragraph of it to give you to set up our text today.

He says this. Churchill said, We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and suffering.

[1 : 12] You ask, what is our policy? I can say it is to wage war by sea, by land and air with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalog of human crime.

That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory. Victory at all costs. Victory in spite of all terror. Victory, however long and hard the road may be.

For without victory, there is no survival. You can see in that why he's a good speaker. Right. But but but but he's making a real point there. And what he's doing is he's calling the British people to suffer.

You know, when was the last time you heard a politician stand up and say, now that you've elected me, you people are going to have to suffer. It's going to be hard. But this is the same speech where he gave those famous lines. I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, sweat and tears.

And I bring that up because Churchill's the idea behind his whole speech was the greatest missions are worthy of the greatest costs.

[2 : 28] The greatest missions are worthy of the greatest costs. And I think when you read Paul in this passage that we're about to read, Paul has that exact same belief. And Paul believes that he has found the great mission.

And because of that, he's willing to pay a great cost for it. And so when we read, I want you to listen for two things. Number one, what does Paul say about his mission? What does this passage tell us about his mission?

And number two, what does Paul tell us here about the cost of mission? OK, so we're going to read. Chapter one, starting at verse 22 through 25.

Hear now the word of God. Paul says, 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 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 the mystery hidden for ages and generations.

[3 : 32] But now revealed to his saints. 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.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone. Mature in Christ.

For this, I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all those who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.

In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Amen. This is God's word. Paul says there that you can't see him face to face because, as you remember, Paul's in prison when he's writing this. And as far as we know, he had never actually met the Colossians before.

[4 : 54] So everything he knows of them, he's hearing secondhand. But I think that the whole thesis of this passage is in those first five words that we read where he says, I rejoice in my sufferings.

And everything else that he says in the passage is really explaining that. And all I want to do this morning is to show two reasons why that's true. Two reasons why Paul rejoices in his sufferings.

And if we have time, I want to offer three reasons that we can rejoice like Paul. Two reasons for his sufferings and then hopefully three reasons why we can rejoice like Paul.

The first reason that Paul rejoices in his suffering, and it's obvious here, is because he sees the greatness of his mission. That allows him to suffer, to be willing to suffer.

For Paul, in this passage, more than anywhere else that we've read so far, he pulls back the curtain on his life to show you how he sees himself. And you see, he says there, he says, God made me a minister for you to make the word of God fully known.

[6 : 00] And that word that God has told him to bring is in verse 26. In verse 26, he said it's something that's been hidden. It's a mystery for a long time. And now, halfway through verse 27, he tells us what the mystery is.

He says, the mystery that I've been called to reveal is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And then verse 28, which I think is the best summary of his mission.

Those first three words of verse 28, he says, him we proclaim. Paul saw the whole point of his life in those three words, him we proclaim.

And, you know, when I think about proclaiming something, I think about standing where I am right now. You know, someone at a pulpit shouting to everyone else what is true. Or someone out in the public square evangelizing, you know.

Or the kid, you know, the kid in the 1920s holding the newspapers shouting out what the headline is. That's what I think of when I think of proclaim. But when the Bible talks about proclaim, it's not so much about the volume of your voice.

[7 : 02] It's about being public about Christ. It's about sharing the word of Christ wherever you are and not just to unbelievers. It's about simply just talking about Christ wherever you are and letting that work its way into whatever is going on in whatever situation you're in.

And it's you proclaim Christ when you're at a Bible study and you're talking about what that passage about Jesus means for your life. Or when you when you sit down with your friend and you tell them that you're going through a difficult time and you tell them about how Jesus has helped you in that time.

You're proclaiming Christ or when you sit down with your child or your grandchild at bedtime and you open up the Jesus story but Bible or whatever, whatever, you know, colored Bible that you have that you use with your kids and you read a Bible story.

That may feel so insignificant. But what you're doing is you're proclaiming Christ. You're you're making public who Jesus is and what he means to us. All those things.

And and you see I make that point to say sometimes when we talk about proclaiming Christ, I think when we only think about evangelism as important as that is, we actually shrink how big this is to Paul because Paul says, I want you to proclaim Christ in every part of your life.

[8 : 21] And you know that because look, for instance, in verse two, two, he says, I want their hearts to be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding the knowledge of God.

He says he's saying, I want I want to proclaim Christ in such a way that you people actually love each other more. That's what proclamation can really do when it's when it's done.

When you're actually talking about Jesus, people begin to love each other better and they begin to love their neighbor better. That's proclamation. And Paul, when he thinks about that, when he thinks about Jesus and that mission that God has called him to, he says to me, that is so big that I'm willing to suffer for it.

I'm willing to be afflicted because I believe so much in that mission. And, you know, we can look at this and we can say, so what? You know, Paul was clearly called by God for a certain purpose.

And, you know, one of the one of the most eerie passages in all of Scripture is when God is talking to someone else about I think it's Jesus is talking to someone else about Paul. And he says, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name because Paul had been a great persecutor of the church.

[9 : 38] And then Jesus says, now that you're mine, you're going to have to suffer. But Paul says it's OK because the mission that he's being called to is so great. But what does that mean to us this morning?

And one of the things that we can say is even though Paul was called to a very specific task, every single one of us is called to push forward, to proclaim Christ wherever we are, to push forward Christ's mission in our world.

That's what remember what Jesus said to his disciples? Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And what else? He says, teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you.

That's the church in a nutshell, right? Proclaiming Jesus, telling other people about him, and then us learning what it means to obey him and to follow him with everything that we are. And so one of the first questions we can ask this morning is, how do you see the mission of the church?

How do you see the mission of Jesus? Because we know this intuitively. Each one of us is only going to sacrifice in accordance with what we see the value of that thing being.

[10 : 41] You know, I'm in the Rotary Club. I like the Rotary Club. But I'm only going to sacrifice so much for the Rotary Club because it doesn't mean that much to me. Right? And all of us have different things in life that we enjoy.

But it's also kind of take it or leave it, right? It's nice to have. But if you didn't have it, you wouldn't die for it. Paul's saying this is different. The mission of Christ is different. It's the kind of thing that when you actually see it for what it is, you're willing to say, you know, God may never call me to give up my life for this.

But if he did, it would be worth it. Because the mission of the church, the mission of Jesus is so worthy. I remember when I was a little boy, I remember driving on family road trips four hours to Louisiana.

And I remember, to me, that was persecution. It was hard with my family. And I was in the back seat. And four hours just felt like it would never end, no matter what I brought to entertain myself.

And then when I got to college, I started dating Carly. And we lived four hours apart from each other. And all of a sudden, I was willing to drive four hours every single weekend.

[11 : 46] And it just felt like the easiest thing in the world. And what had changed? The cost of the trip had not changed. The time had not changed. But boy, the mission had changed. Right?

I was on a mission to see someone that I loved. And, you know, in the book of Revelation, when Jesus talks to the churches, one of the ways that he calls the church to repent is he tells one of the churches, you have lost your first love.

And Paul can suffer greatly because he loves Jesus. And you can't fake that. When you really grasp the mission of Jesus, suffering will come naturally.

And you will say, yes, I've suffered greatly. But it was worth it because of what I found. Okay? Romans 8.18. Paul puts it like this. He says, I reckon.

Because he was a southern man, right? I reckon. He says, I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

[12 : 53] You see, on one hand, he says, don't you know how greatly I have suffered for the gospel? And on the same breath, he says, but it's nothing compared to what I'm getting out of this deal, which is Jesus Christ.

Okay? So what you see, one reason why Paul can rejoice in his suffering is because he sees the greatness of the mission. Okay? But another reason, the second reason why he can rejoice in his suffering is because he can see God's power in the suffering.

You know, when I read this passage, and I read it a lot this week because it confused me at first when I read it. You know, I can understand, I can kind of understand him saying, I rejoice in my sufferings.

But what really throws me off is when he says, and I am, you see it in the first verse, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. To me, that sounds shocking.

And I say to myself, if I didn't know that was in the Bible already and someone told me, would you believe that Paul said this? I would say, there's no way he said that. But it's here, and he said it. And so we have to make sense of it.

[14 : 00] And one thing we have to say at first is, when Jesus died on the cross, do you remember what his last words were? It is finished. And so in one sense, everything that Jesus, that we need of Jesus, he has already done.

I think somewhere it says, of the work of Christ, in Jesus's death, nothing less was required and nothing more is required.

He gave us exactly what we need in his death. So what's going on here? Why does Paul say, I am filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions? What he's talking about is, Paul believes this, and the scriptures bear this out.

There's an ordinary kind of suffering for Christ that carries forward the mission of Christ in our own time and place.

I want to say that one more time. There's an ordinary type of suffering for Christ that actually carries forward the mission of Christ in our own time and place. And that makes sense, I think, if you think about it.

[15 : 06] Because, you know, we talked about this on Wednesday nights. On Wednesday nights, we've been going through the Lord's Prayer. And last week, we talked about what do we mean when we say, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

And part of what we mean is, we believe that Christ's kingdom, even now, is expanding. And the more people that come to believe in Jesus Christ, the more people repent of their sins, the further the gospel goes out.

All those things are expanding the kingdom of Christ in our world. And at the same time, something else is happening, right? The kingdom of Satan is shrinking. And doesn't it make sense that as the kingdom of Christ expands, the kingdom of Satan would want to push back?

And so Paul knows. He says, wherever Christ is going out, wherever Christ is pushing the boundaries of his kingdom, Satan is pushing back, and there's going to be pain.

There's going to be suffering. You see that in the book of Acts. And Paul knows this because he was on the other side of the suffering. Where in the early church, Paul was persecuting the church.

[16 : 09] But you see what happens so often is, at the very moment where the church is suffering the most, God is doing the most. You know, what happens when Paul really puts his thumb down on Jerusalem?

And they really start to go after the Christians. Well, what happens is, the Christians scatter all over the ancient Near East. And so the gospel goes out and it's dispersed in a way that it never could have been without the persecution.

Isn't that amazing? Isn't that amazing? So often when the church is suffering the most, God is doing the most for the gospel and he's expanding the kingdom. And Paul sees that. He sees the power in God's suffering.

And he believes that every single thing that he suffers matters. You know, I could suffer all day long to become a professional athlete. And you look at me and you know, all that suffering will be in vain.

You know, sometimes we suffer and it's, it doesn't do us any good. But Paul believed that every ounce of sweat and every ounce of blood that he poured out, what Christ was using to build up his church.

[17 : 11] And, you know, one of the ways you see that is there at the end of, at the end of verse. Oh, you know, you know what happens when you're in the pulpit and you lose your place in the Bible.

Verse 29, chapter one. Paul says, for this, I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. So Paul believed that in the midst of the suffering, that God was actually the one that was empowering him and giving him the endurance to suffer, which means that God is using it.

There's a, there's a place in Revelation chapter six, where Paul, where John has this strange vision of all the martyrs who have died for Christ.

And what they're doing is they're, they're standing at the foot of the throne and they're all crying out, how long? Oh Lord, they're crying out for God to find it for Jesus to finally return and fix everything.

How long? Oh Lord. And what the response that they get is there are still more martyrs that have to die, which is a, it's a strange thing, but it's also an encouraging thing because it means that no martyr ever dies in a useless way.

[18 : 27] God is always using all of our suffering to build up his church. And God is saying, I'm going to keep building up my church. And yes, the church is going to keep suffering, but I'm going to keep doing it so that the gospel can go out and so that more people can hear about Jesus.

First Peter four. Peter's talking to people like you and to me and he says, Dear friends, do not be surprised when fiery at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ.

Isn't that interesting language? You participate in the sufferings of Christ. So that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. You know, when, when you and I suffer for Jesus and suffer for the church, and I'm not just talking about the missionary martyr who dies somewhere that we've never heard of.

Even though that's, that is glorious. I'm talking about when you're in the church and people aren't getting along. And, and in order to do the right thing and to hold people together, you're suffering.

And it's painful. Even in that, Christ is building up his church and he's using our suffering for something good. Okay. Let me close with this briefly.

[19 : 57] How can we rejoice like Paul? So, so Paul can rejoice because he sees the greatness of the mission and, and he knows that he can see God's power in his suffering.

But how can we rejoice like Paul today? Three quick reasons. Number one, do not be surprised when loving the church comes at a cost. You know, I think when, when you meet a lot of people who have given up on the church and they would say, well, I'm still a Christian, but I don't go to church anymore.

Isn't it often the case they gave up because they say it just got too hard. Uh, it, it just, it felt, it was too painful. And some people have had real struggles with the church and there's sometimes, sometimes the church sins against people, individual congregations.

They mistreat people. And, and we have to acknowledge that, but we can't, at the same time, we also have to say, when you come to the church, you have to expect suffering because what's going on here?

If we're really doing what God has called us to do, we're, we're pushing back the kingdom of Satan. Uh, and who, who should be surprised when Satan pushes back against that and when conflicts arise and, uh, when, as the church grows, bickering happens because Christ, what is he doing?

[21 : 09] He's bringing in people that in any other situation would not belong together. And I think that's one reason why Paul in this passage, he points out the fact that what really blows him away about the gospel part of it is the fact that this is going out to the Gentiles.

He says to them, to the saints, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery. You know, if you were a Jew just before Jesus was born and someone said, can you imagine this synagogue being full of Gentiles?

You would have said, no way. Let it, let it never be so. And then when Jesus comes, he says, no, I'm, I'm coming to call every nation to myself. He's going to bring together people that would never belong to with each other except for the gospel.

And so you should expect suffering, right? You should expect people not to get along because only grace would hold people like this together. Um, Paul, you put it like this, Paul in everything that he did, he always put the church ahead of himself.

And he put Christ's mission ahead of himself so that if he had to choose between his own welfare and his own satisfaction and peace or the peace of the church, he would have chosen the peace of the church.

[22 : 24] He would have chosen Jesus's mission over his own, whatever he wanted in his life. And eventually what he wanted was what Jesus wanted, right? Okay. Second thing here, how can we rejoice like Paul?

Take the long view, take the longest view. You know, when I, when I think about marathon runners, to me, those are, those are the long-term people, the people who train for a year.

You know, they've got a, they've got a long game plan for their race. And when they're racing, they've got a long game plan, right? Four hours if they're lucky. The mission of the church is compared, compared to think about compared to that.

The mission of the church is thousands of years. And we don't know how much longer it will be before Jesus returns. Could it be another 10,000 years? When will Jesus return?

We don't know, but we have to think long-term. You know, so often we think in terms of what is this church going to do in the next three months? And that's good. You got to have plans. But we also have to think, what do we want to be our legacy a hundred years from now?

[23 : 25] What do we want our legacy to be 200 years from now? You know, wouldn't it, wouldn't it be wonderful? Isn't it wonderful to imagine that maybe the best thing this church ever does is bring the gospel to, you know, one of these three-year-old children.

And they have a grandchild who goes on to become one of the great missionaries the world has ever known. Or one of the great preachers the world has ever known. And you never know how God will use our church, but you have to take the long vision.

And taking the long vision means saying, we're going to prioritize the mission of Christ's church over our short-term needs, our short-term wants.

It'll all be about what will serve the mission the best. Wendell Berry is a famous writer, and he's a farmer and a poet. And so all his illustrations are always trees and fruit and stuff.

I remember I read him once say that the most beautiful image in all of the world that he can imagine is an old man planting a tree. Because to him as a farmer, it was the ultimate selfless act.

[24 : 30] Because when an old man plants a tree, he's putting effort and hope into something that he knows he will never see. And wouldn't it be great if that was the posture of our church saying, you know, well, think about 60 years ago.

People I don't know put money and time and effort into building this place. And all of us are beneficiaries of that sacrifice. What is God calling of us to do for people that we'll never meet, but we want to see them know the gospel.

And we believe that we'll see them one day in the new heavens and the new earth. Lastly, how can we rejoice like Paul? It's simple and it kind of goes back to something we've already said, but it's to see in the grace of Jesus Christ a mission worth dying for.

And, you know, all of us are so comfortable this morning that it's strange to even bring up the idea of dying for the gospel. But Jesus looked at every one of his disciples and he said, if you want to be my disciple, you must take up your cross.

And in Luke, he says, you must take up your cross daily and come after me. The only way that we can really do that with all of our heart is not by picking ourselves up by our bootstraps.

[25 : 46] It's not by just getting tough. It's by seeing in Jesus something so worthy of our lives that that we say, if I lay my life down, that is a small price to pay for what I gain in Jesus Christ.

I remember we had a seminary professor who used to talk about all these. He was an Old Testament professor. And so he would talk about all these things we don't know yet, like how to translate this word just perfectly.

Or he would talk about the need for translators to go and bring the Bible to languages that we've never heard of. And oftentimes he would say, talk about something that needed to be done. And then he would look at us and he would say, you know, that would be a great, a wonderful way for one of you to give your life serving the Lord and die in total obscurity.

And that was his vision for the good life. Give everything you have for Jesus and die in total obscurity. And it would be worth it because of what Jesus, because of who Jesus is, because of what he has for us.

And if you keep your eye on Jesus, one last thing, what does that keep? What is how does that help us? One thing it does. It keeps our hearts from bitterness because isn't it easy to suffer for the church, to suffer for Columbia Presbyterian Church and say, you know, I've given so much to this place.

[27 : 05] Don't people see? Or, you know, I loved this person so well and I get nothing back. I see no fruit from this relationship. But if you keep your eyes on the grace of Jesus, then you can you can look back and you can say.

It's OK, because Jesus has given me everything that I need. It doesn't matter if I get paid back in this life. It doesn't matter if no one sees the work that I give because I'm not doing it for that.

I'm doing it for Jesus Christ and to see his great mission pushed out. The greatest missions are worthy of the greatest costs.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us. Help us to see how good Jesus is. Help us to remember our first love, our Lord and Savior, and help us to be willing to give up anything that you ask of us to serve his kingdom.

In your son's name we pray. Amen.